



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

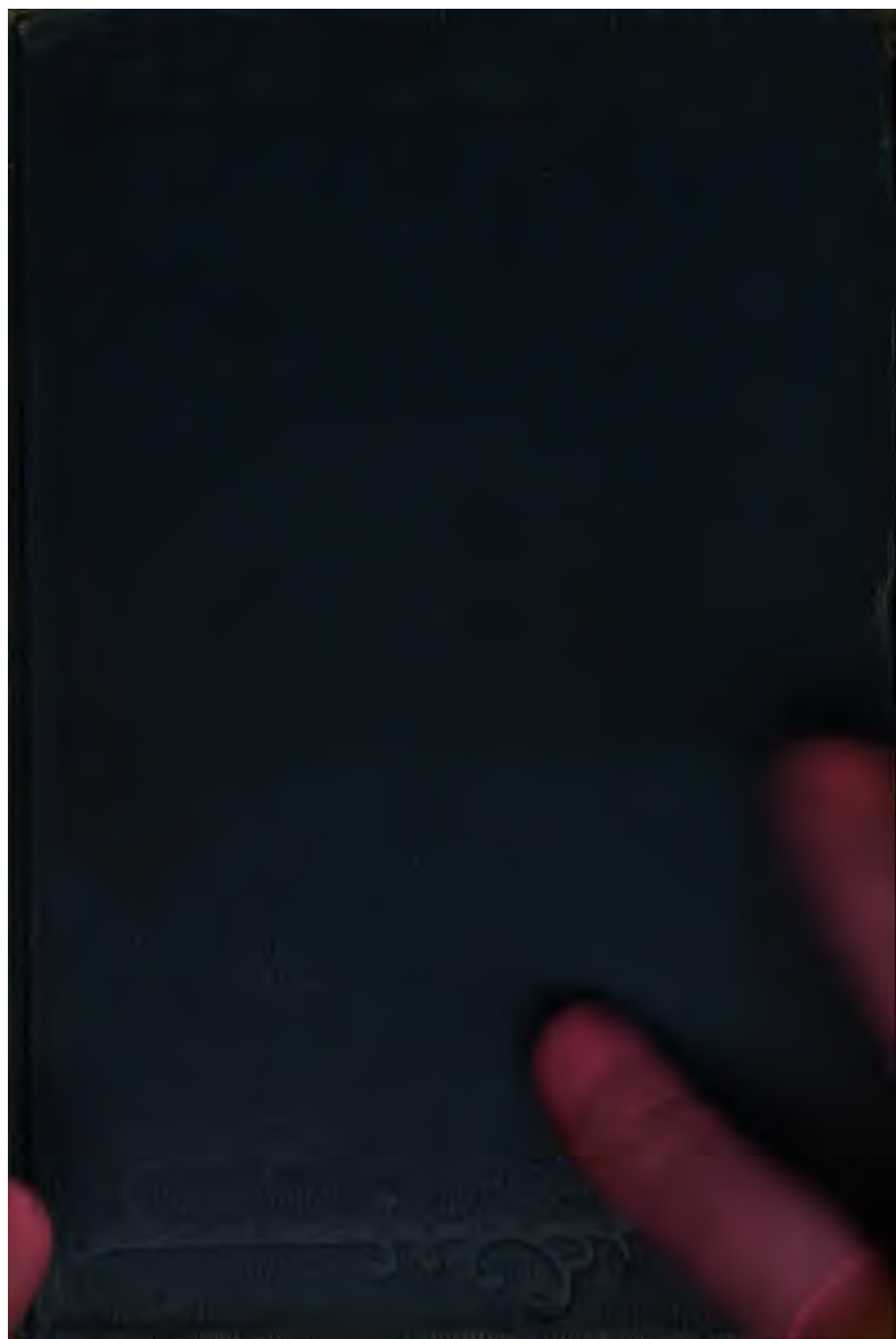
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

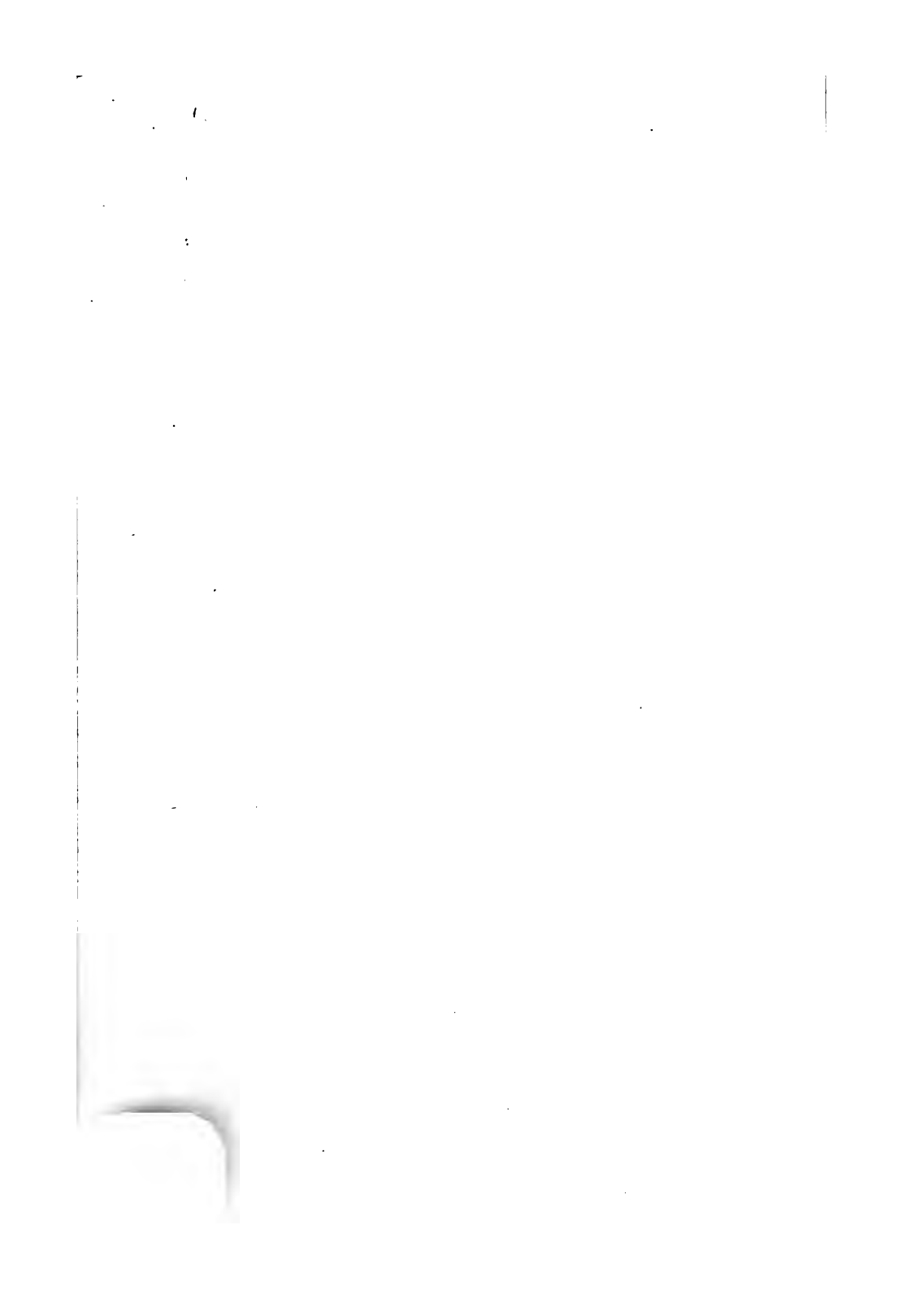
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>









SOME PORTRAITS OF WOMEN
(VOYAGEUSES)

UNIFORM WITH
"SOME PORTRAITS OF WOMEN"

A TRAGIC IDYL

By PAUL BOURGET

Price 6s.

SOME PORTRAITS OF WOMEN

(VOYAGEUSES)

BY

PAUL BOURGET

AUTHOR OF "A TRAGIC IDYL," ETC.

TRANSLATED BY

WILLIAM MARCHANT

LONDON

DOWNEY & CO. LIMITED

12 YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN

1898

PQ2199

r913

VOYAGEUSES

HERE on my table, within reach of my hand, lie fifteen or twenty volumes of manuscript, some thicker and some thinner, with the following titles: *Provence, Italy, Spain, England, Greece, Syria, Palestine, Morocco, Germany, America*—like the table of contents of a hand-book of geography. It gives me pleasure to turn over the pages of this journal of my enthusiastically vagrant youth, as it did, when a child, to look over the herbarium in which I preserved, with dates and names, the plants gathered in my school-boy walks. Innumerable human silhouettes take life for me across these pages. Those that I evoke most gladly are faces of women, seen for a week, a day, an hour—the romance of whose lives I divined (or, perhaps, imagined) from some sudden incident of travel. Some of these occurrences are recent, others remote. One or two remain associated with tragic memories. I have brought together several of them which seem to me to form a whole, giving them this common title of "*Voyageuses*," because it is really a series of portraits of women whom I have met thus casually, sketched in the rapid light of the most fleeting impression. For once our paths crossed, never again to meet in this world. In regard to most of them, I do not know where they live

or if they yet live. When I think of them they come before me in the momentary setting in which I knew them: a ship's deck, upon the Mediterranean or the Atlantic; the nave of an old Italian basilica; the terrace of a foreign palace; a city street, where neither they nor I have ever been since; a corner of a passing carriage. But does not this very rapidity of passage make the singular poetry, the unequalled charm, of these women, known just enough for one to be sorry for their sadness, to be glad at their happiness, and not enough to suffer from having seen them disappear for ever?

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. ANTIGONE	1
II. TWO MARRIED COUPLES	45
III. NEPTUNE VALE	75
IV. A WOMAN'S CHARITY	141
V. ODILE	179
VI. LA PIA	221

I

ANTIGONE

I

ANTIGONE

I

WE do not choose our recollections. I am never more keenly conscious of the truth of this maxim than when looking — with homesickness, as too often happens to me — at the map of that divine lake, that Mediterranean Sea, which I have so often traversed, which I hope to traverse so often again. Upon the faintly tinted surface of this map, my eyes follow the indentations of those shores, almost every cape of which I have rounded, and they rest on the long black spot which represents the adorable island of Corfu. Corfu! What traveller could speak that name without a sigh, if he has ever walked beneath the silvery green of its enormous, unpruned olive trees, opposite the wild coast of Epirus, which lifts its mountains white with snow across the straits so intensely blue by day, so faintly lilac by night? Corfu! What poet has not dreamed, over these magic syllables, of lingering, indolent pleasures? What lover has not imagined a paradise of perfume and solitude around a happy, reciprocated love? A chance meeting

on a journey decrees that the Corcyra of fable evokes for me far different figures: first, that of a friend whom I had there, older than I by forty years,—who has since gone to join, in that mysterious country whence none return, those wise men of old whom he so much resembled; then, that of a former schoolmate, now one of the most disreputable politicians of the Palais Bourbon, and there is a choice; lastly, and indeed chiefly, that of the sister of this dishonest individual, a person thirty-five years of age, unmarried, whom I saw only for a few days, but who many a time has haunted my reveries. And neither did the gently austere face of M. Napoléon Zaffoni (such was the name of my old friend, born during the First Empire), nor the audacious and feline profile of the too famous opportunist deputy, Clément Malglaive, nor the wasted and anxious features of that melancholy Christine Malglaive, seem made to be associated with scenes where the gold of the ripened orange shines from the dark branches, where the waters have the smile of eyes that love us, where the delicate foliage of olive trees reminds one of waving hair. Some one has said very wisely that existence gives us only that which we carry within ourselves. Why should it be strange, then, that for me—who have a mania for psychological curiosities and dramas of the inner life—even the most sensuously beautiful scenes of this most beautiful of islands, should serve merely as setting for a moral tragedy?

This journey to Corfu, with its incident of this brief tragedy, occurred in the spring of 1893. The date has its importance. It was—who does not remember?—the most distressing period of that sad episode in our domestic struggles which has been called the Panama Campaign. No good Frenchman could open a newspaper at that time without asking himself with anguish what new name would be added next to the list, already so long, of dishonest ministers and deputies. Among these names one of the first to be mentioned had been that of my old schoolmate at Louis-le-Grand, this Malglaive, with whom I had passed many years side by side on the same bench of the same class. Every one who followed the debates in the Chamber at that time will remember the accusation publicly made against him, and his defence—very courageous, it must be admitted, but not very convincing. However, no prosecution was decreed against him, his accusers being unable to prove that he had received the sum of 18,000 francs credited to him in the note-book of a too famous agent of bribery. Although I had not seen Malglaive since our school days, the memory of this youthful companionship caused me to follow the debate closely, and the impression that remained to me, very unfavourable to the accused, could not but render it most unpleasant for me to meet him again, especially under the conditions of intimacy imposed by a little city in a thinly populated little island. And then I

so little expected to find him here! Far enough from dishonest Paris I believed myself to be, that radiant morning late in winter, when, leaning against the rail of the steamer which plies between Brindisi and Greece, I saw the citadel of Corfu emerge from the waves! The vessel was cleaving her way with gentle motion through an almost smooth sea, blue as sapphire or lapis lazuli. One by one, I recognized the various details of the dear landscape: here, the Pantokrator, the huge mountain shaped like an altar; opposite, the mountain chains of Albania, glittering with snow; in front, and more remote, the island of Vido, half hiding the harbour; and, all along the coast of the island, narrow creeks in which ended the long, cool declivity of the gentle, shaded slopes. Not a garden wall in all this oasis; only hedges of roses, agaves, and cactus marked the limits of the vast olive and orange groves and sugar plantations, and I was on the watch, as we drew near, for the venerable figure of M. Zaffoni, whom I had come to visit. As I write his name, the years that separate me from that visit seem to vanish. I see myself, as soon as we had passed Vido, seeking with my glass to discover among the boats the one in which he was. I knew well that, for all his eighty years, he would never let me set foot upon his native island without giving me his old-fashioned, hospitable welcome. I see again the skiffs approaching us, passing each other, getting in each other's way. I hear the

hoarse cry of the rowers, the Greek and Italian words that fly through the air. I see the porters with their Moorish faces, catching hold of the scuttles before the ladder is let down, and the health inspector has set foot on the deck. There in the distance, coming off from the pier, above which rises the old city with its Venetian aspect, another boat appears, this one just at the opportune moment. I might recognize, by this one little token, the old man's strict punctuality. The boat comes within speaking distance, and I recognize himself, seated in the stern, with his slender figure wrapped in various top-coats, one over another, and his face with its delicate features framed in English whiskers. He holds a gold-headed cane—the gift of his illustrious friend, Lord Beaconsfield—between the gray cloth gloves which he always wore. And now he sees me. His intelligent and expressive face is lighted up by a smile. A few strokes of the oar, and the boat is alongside. Alert as a young man, he has his foot instantly on the ladder, regardless of his servant, who offers assistance; and he gives me an embrace of welcome as he says:

“You see the island has made herself radiant to receive you. Do you remember the wish of our little beggars, that Mérimée liked so much: ‘May you enjoy your eyes’?”

My old friend had indeed become very well acquainted with the author of *Colomba* through our con-

sul at Corfu under the July monarchy, M. Grasset, the friend of Stendhal. But whom had he not known among the famous men of his time in Paris and in London, this alert old man, who now moved about among the luggage, pointing out with his stick my boxes, and, to spare me even the slight annoyance of the customs inspection, giving numerous orders, with his little, precise, measured gestures? Here is what, to me, gave his personality a character at once admirable and pathetic. I knew that this small Corfiote landowner, agile as a lizard, had been, and was still, one of the ablest, one of the most versatile minds of his time — incomparable as an orator, an admirable logician, a man who had studied in Florence, Berlin, Paris, and London, speaking the four languages and knowing the four literatures like his own, having never ceased to follow with ardour the movement of European ideas. But all this knowledge, all this splendid ability, had had for its field of action and development only the insignificant little city, his birthplace, which he would not desert because she had not her liberty. At the age of thirty, hypnotized, as were so many of his fellow-citizens, by the memory and the dream of ancient Greece, he had established himself in Corfu as a lawyer, and had entered the parliament of the Ionian Islands with the purpose of opposing the English protectorate established by the treaties of 1814, and bringing about as soon as possible the union of these islands

with the Hellenic kingdom. I also knew that his struggle against the English and the close study of them which he had made, had had a singular result in this noble mind. He had become an admirer of this superior race, not on that account ceasing, however, to be the uncompromising patriot who fought for unity. But this clear-sighted patriotism had, indeed, no cause to rejoice when, in 1864, England definitively abandoned the islands. At the same time ended also M. Zaffoni's political career. Discarded by the Athenian politicians, as much on account of his honesty as his eloquence, no post was offered him in which he could manifest his ability, and he continued from that time to waste his old age, as he had wasted his youth, imprisoned in the mediocrity of circumstances, and, stoical by nature and by training, accepting that mediocrity like one of those old heroes of whom he often spoke: "One of Plutarch's characters." It was good to hear him say these four words. This cult, somewhat *rococo*, for the simple-minded old historian had been transmitted to my friend by certain of the survivors of our eighteenth century whom he had known in Paris when a boy. With this, much wit, an "incomparable judgment," as the phrase used to be, a good-nature which was unfailing because derived from untiring goodness of heart, an indulgence arising from a universal comprehension, a fluency and depth in conversation, an immense erudition, a manly courage in the presence of the idea of suffering and of death — how

many reasons for admiring him as much as I loved him! I felt them, all these reasons, freshened, so to speak, by his presence, as our boat glided through the water of a dense, opaque, so to speak, mineral blue, and I asked him about his health.

"You know," he said, "I call myself the belated traveller. You came very near never seeing me again. Two or three winters ago, I suffered much with my throat. For a perfect cure, the doctor bade me speak as little as possible. Upon this I decided not to speak at all. I wrote my orders on a slate, and for three full months I never uttered a word. It was excellent. I took the opportunity to reread Lord Macaulay, pen in hand.—Ah! how good is English good sense!"

"Three full months without uttering a word!" I exclaimed. "Why, that is heroism, equal to the best in your beloved Plutarch."

"Don't call it heroism," he said; "it is only the habit of obeying the dictates of reason. *Be persuaded*"—this was a favourite expression with him—"that it is much more difficult to write one single page of the essay upon Pitt—"

"And your memoirs? Since we are speaking of writing, have you done much?"

"I have reached the year 1863, the eve of our independence," he said. "I write in three languages, which keeps me back. The book has become a history of our

two assemblies during the period when we were a kind of Mediterranean Canada. Those fifty years, from 1814 to 1864, were, without doubt, the finest in our history. We were striving for liberty; and to strive is sometimes better than to succeed. Our two assemblies were a constitutional régime in miniature, a microscopic parliament, by the side of that at Westminster. But there was good fighting there, sometimes! Then we died of our victory, like the bee—" he added, with a smile and a sigh. "Corfu has never been so insignificant as now. You will read what I have written, condensing as much as I could. When I finally publish those pages, they will be like a piece of fossiliferous rock, with its imprint of a fern, faded centuries ago, which no man had ever gathered. We shall have been—my friends and I—a tuft of grass in a valley unvisited by human foot. And yet I cannot but cling to the thought of leaving this little imprint, after we are gone, this written proof that we did our civic duty. One day some English or French essayist will read my two hundred pages, for the purpose of obtaining a note or two on some point of history or of constitutional law. And the bit of fern will not have grown in vain. By the way, the other day I put this to the test. I lent these reminiscences to one of your public men, passing through the island. I had the pleasure of seeing that they interested him. It is some one you know. He tells me that he was a schoolmate of yours—M. Clément Malglaive—"

"Clément Malglaive!" I interrupted. "It is true we were at Louis-le-Grand together, in the same class; but I confess I would rather never see him again — after what you know as well as I do! I hope that dishonest man is no longer here."

"He is here," replied M. Zaffoni. By his look I perceived that, in manifesting, with such inconsiderate vehemence, my opinion in regard to Malglaive, I had offended the sense of perfect equity which ruled in this upright man's heart. It is true that there had been no proof produced against my old schoolmate which gave me liberty to declare him guilty and to speak of him so implacably. I felt that my old friend blamed me for my sudden severity. Our landing, and then the formalities of the custom-house, interrupted the conversation. I recurred to it in the landau which bore us along over the rough pavement of streets bordered by low arcades, towards the esplanade where M. Zaffoni resided, and I endeavoured to explain to him my severity in regard to Malglaive.

"I saw that you did not approve of the expression I used just now," I said to him, "*that dishonest man*, — said rather too hastily, I am willing to confess. But, if you had known him as I did, a boy in school, you would have the same impression, I am sure. At seventeen, the two leading traits in his character were vanity and sensuality. I have never seen any one, at that age, when it is natural to be obstinate and brusque,

carry flexibility and the desire to please to the extent that he did. He always agreed with the person he was talking with. You—who know life so well—you know better than I do how rapidly this need for approbation, this desire to produce a good effect, demoralizes a nature, and how very near it comes to falseness. And then, even as early as that, Malglaive had already a taste for pleasure and luxury. He was fond of races, the theatre, expensive restaurants, and the like. How did he find time to get his lessons and to gain prizes at examinations, with such habits? We used to wonder. Allow me to go on with the story. He was a young fellow who could not have inherited more than an income of 15,000 francs from his father, a general practitioner in Paris. I think, too, he had a sister, who must have shared this property. He studied law, and certainly could have had no opportunity of laying up money at that period of his life. He made his way into the group surrounding Gambetta, and after the election of the 363, he was appointed sub-prefect and then prefect. Again he had no opportunity to save money, and especially because he profited by his official position to become *persona gratissima* in his department, and to secure election as deputy. It is expensive to make oneself popular. He is now deputy, having a salary of 9000 francs. Granted that he still has the 15,000 francs income that he inherited from the doctor. And suppose that he earns 15,000 francs

more by writing for the press. He writes well, I admit. Now let us add this up: it gives him 40,000 francs a year. His manner of living has been made known by his enemies. Any person who knows Paris at all must see that such a life as his, where the twenty-franc piece is the unit of expense, requires sixty or eighty thousand francs a year,—I make the lowest estimate, for it has been said that Malglaive is a gambler also,—and in that case! But at any rate, he must get from some quarter the thirty or forty thousand francs that he lacks. You may say, he spends his capital. It is a vicious circle. If his capital is diminished, his income lessens also, and the annual deficit increases. Then, a man resorts to ‘business,’ and you know what that means to a public man; he begins by selling his influence and his name; finally, he sells his vote. These are the reasons why I am convinced in my own mind that Malglaive has simply let himself be bought in this scandalous Panama affair, and you must admit there is a strong probability that I am right.”

“*Be persuaded,*” was M. Zaffoni’s reply, “that we must make more allowance than that to a man of great talent, and Malglaive is a man of great, very great, talent. You speak of his faults of youth. Do you not know—you, a pupil of Goethe—that our future merits develop at first as faults? That instinct to please and charm was the passion of statecraft awakening in him, a first

apprenticeship in the management of men. Those luxurious tastes, that sensuality even, — this was the strength of his vitality. The greatest of men have had these frivolous tastes, — Disraeli, in our time; Cæsar, in the old world. As to his expenditures, I grant that they have been large. What then? Suppose Malglaive has incurred debts, very large debts — does it follow that he has made traffic of his public office? No. No. No. I have talked with him much since he has been here, and I say that this man is a power, a real power, that must not be thrown away. On the contrary, it is the duty of you who are his comrades, since there is no actual proof against him, to complete his vindication, so that he shall not be crushed. For that matter, I would trust him to recover himself. He has such energy! You will see, he will be in the cabinet some day, and he will be a good minister, too. He has made me understand so well the present political situation in France. Ah! he is a valuable man, and it would be a real misfortune if, through a calumny, the invention, no doubt, of some base foe, this fellow should lose such a magnificent opportunity — a place in the French ministry, with all Europe for his field of action.”

My friend ceased speaking. His keen eyes ranged for a moment over the scene in which his own life had been spent. The narrow street with its irregular houses was crowded with the mongrel population common to countries too often invaded, in which the base blending

of races is manifest to the eye. The noblest types were those of Albanians, in white fustanella and tight breeches, the feet in leather shoes turned up in a point and adorned with silk tassels. A fez upon the head, the embroidered jacket on the shoulders, a long pistol with a silver knob stuck through the girdle, these barbarians stood chatting with each other before the low stalls, where were displayed all the poor articles of Levantine food: black olives, salted provisions, unclean fried things, oily cakes, nauseous sweetmeats. An odour, at once rancid, sour, and insipid, escaped thence; and there was a row of money-changers' stalls, where Jews, recognizable by their aquiline type, were counting piles of silver money of various coinages. Placards gave the rate of exchange, and, in their turn, made apparent the penury of the national life, with their statement of the day's quotations: the drachma, the Greek franc, worth seventy-five centimes. Here and there, in niches, there were madonnas, stiff Byzantine icons very like the primitive idol; and the priests, whom we were continually meeting, those *pappas* with untrimmed beard, and gown green with hard wear, and brutal, slothful face, under the tall cap, proved, too clearly, by their mere aspect, that even the religious life was in a state of decay like the rest. Then flashed upon me in contrast the vision of that place de la Concorde, which Malglaive must have traversed so often on his way to the Chamber of Deputies. All the vigour and all the elegance of a

civilization still in its prime seemed to me as symbolized by that intensely vital bit of contemporary Paris. The hopelessly, irreparably provincial element in the destiny of the old man who had just now so hotly defended Malglaive, made my heart ache. Why had not chance given to him — the irreproachable — that “magnificent opportunity” of which he spoke, which somewhere a poet has called “*un vrai pays de gloire*”? And I heard him go on, with his lofty and impartial serenity, making his plea for my old schoolmate:

“And, besides, there is in the life of Malglaive an element which you have not taken into account. You do not know, perhaps, that he lives with his sister? Yes, she keeps house for him. And this sister, when you see her, — for she is here with him, — you will understand that *he could not have done that thing*. For her sake, if there were no other reason, it would have been impossible for him to disgrace himself — he who is her cult, her pride, her faith. No. He has not done it,” he repeated. “She is an Antigone, you will see: a creature all devotion, all nobleness. You remember the line of Sophokles:

Οὔτοι συνέχθην, ἀλλὰ συμφίλῃν ἔφην. . . .

But with my modern pronunciation you do not understand: ‘My nature is to share in love, but not in hate.’ If for no other reason than because of her, I should believe in the innocence of Malglaive. You

will not refuse to dine with the two? I have invited them for to-morrow evening. But don't be anxious; I will not *lionize* you!"

II

M. Zaffoni occupied the second story, the *piano nobile*, of a palace, somewhat dilapidated but imposing still, which had, in the time of Venetian rule, served as official residence to some *proveditore* of the Most Serene Republic, for the lion of St. Mark could yet be seen over the door, with wings erect and paw upon the book with its inscription: *Pax tibi, Marce, Evangelista meus*. The singularity of the old man's quarters consisted in this, —that, obeying his innocent anglomania, he had furnished with furniture bought in London and had hung with wall papers obtained there also, these lofty rooms, whose tall windows were framed in coloured stuccos and their ceilings painted in fresco. The black mahogany of tables and bookcases, the massive form of the sofas and armchairs, the mantelpieces in *étagères*, the hanging of the curtains with their brass rings and rods, the huge chrysanthemums of the wall paper,—all the details of these quiet rooms suggested some little dwelling in Kent or Surrey, while tall personages in sumptuous costumes, boldly designed after the manner of Tiepolo, overhung this British interior, and a southern sky filled the windows with its intense blue. Looking out, one beheld the palm-trees of the esplanade, and the citadel covered

with that luxuriant grass that the peasants of Provence call witchfoot, and those of Italy, Jupiter's beard. Over the water of the Straits glided the red sails of boats from Chioggia. Glancing about the room again, the eye encountered a vast collection of bound volumes of the *Times*, equal to that which crowds the corridors in the basement of the Athenæum Club. This incongruous apartment was filled with sheaves of the beautiful island flowers—another of the old man's passions. How often have I heard him recite with enthusiasm Meleager's divine lines :

Ἦδη λευχοῖον θαλλεῖ . . .

"Already the white violet is in flower. She blooms, the flower which loves the rains,—the narcissus. They bloom, the lilies which love the mountains."

It was there among these famous flowers, in the presence of this luminous landscape, under the splendour of the Venetian fresco scarcely lessened by time, that the old leader of the opposition in the Ionian parliament wrote the memoir which was to be the lasting imprint of the little fern. There also I met again, after so many years, this Clément Malglaive, concerning whose integrity I had so serious doubts,—shaken, however, by M. Zaffoni's ardent defence. And it was there that the appearance of Antigone, as our host had named her, made me wish that his plea had been just, and that the brother had indeed been held back,

at every temptation to baseness, by a respect for the feeling that this admirable sister had for him.

My first impression, as my old schoolmate came forward to meet me, was very different from that which I expected. I had parted, twenty-two years before, from the Malglaive whom, on the preceding evening, I described to M. Zaffoni, — affected, crafty, flattering, vaguely sly. I now met a man matured by action, the face resolute, the language direct, the gesture energetic. No trace of embarrassment revealed that, three months before, he had passed through a crisis in which his political future had narrowly escaped shipwreck, or that he had brought with him on this journey any thought of the difficulties that might await his return. He spoke to me of our common past; then of the joy that he felt in these rambles in Greece, far away from the Parisian furnace; lastly, of the pleasure that he had had in making the acquaintance of our host: and all this in a tone so natural, so simple, that it was I—I must confess—who was somewhat out of countenance. I was the more so, inasmuch as it was not merely M. Zaffoni's glance which I had to meet that said as plainly as words: "Come, now! Is that man dishonest?" As Malglaive came forward to meet me, I had surprised other eyes fixed upon mine—those of Antigone, of the devoted sister, who visibly was watching my demeanour, and showed in her whole aspect evidence of the extreme grief which had been caused her by the accusa-

tion made against her brother. Her cheeks were thin and pale. Her eyelids, reddened by tears, quivered nervously over eyes that seemed to glitter as she looked at me. She opened and shut her fan with feverish haste. I have since understood that no doubt concerning her idolized brother had ever grazed this beautiful soul, which knew how to love: and to know how to love is first of all, is always, not to judge the one beloved, it is to believe in him against all persons and all things, against probability, against evidence! But while Christine Malglaive had preserved absolute faith in the honour of this brother, whom she had adored from her infancy blindly and continuously, she was not unaware of the attacks that had been made upon him, and it had been the torture of her life for the last three months to know that others did not think as she did. For this reason her burning black eyes—the sole beauty, the supreme youth of her prematurely faded face—lost not one motion made by me, and for this reason, also, I trembled lest some instinctive gesture might betray to her what was passing in my thoughts. For once my will mastered my nerves, and I did not allow a trace of my own perturbation to appear. I was repaid for this effort by the relief which came like a flash into poor Antigone's tense face. She said to herself: "He does not believe that my brother was capable of the dishonourable act of which he is accused." And this certainty sent a freer, warmer blood through all

her veins. Yes, poor Antigone—and how she must have suffered, that this mere meeting between her brother and an old schoolmate should smite her with so cruel an anxiety! To despise calumny is so easy, when it concerns oneself only; so hard, when it concerns another!

But was it, indeed, calumny—the accusation against Malglaive? I remember that, during this first evening, the utmost energy of my mind was bent upon the solution of this problem, concerning which I had no other data than the appearance of this man who, if guilty, would naturally keep strict watch upon himself; and, if innocent, would do the same. To know oneself suspected with a show of justice, produces effects absolutely similar to those produced by remorse. Whether or not it was acting, not for one moment during this first evening did Malglaive depart from that gay and cordial tone with which he had met me. I remember that, at table, I watched him as he ate, to assure myself that this happy mood was not feigned; and I am obliged to affirm that he thoroughly enjoyed the excellent repast our host had provided for us, of national dishes, but cooked with exquisite skill: mullet-roe and caviare, to begin; then, a fish soup; then, khébab; followed by grouse, fried egg-plant, and, for dessert, that odd kind of cake called *baklara*, a sort of pastry made with honey and olive oil. Dried figs with pistachio nuts, goat's-milk cheese, mandarins of delicious fragrance, and incomparable sweetmeats completed this

menu, with a château Yquem and a Margaux worthy of the table of a prince.

"These are some cases of wine that I have had in my cellar for thirty-five years," our host said modestly; "we had forgotten they were there. Accidentally the servant discovered them the other day behind a wood-pile, and it was fortunate, for I have no decent Greek wine except the Mavro Daphné; you shall try it directly."

And when the grape *liqueur* arrived, so prettily named "wine of the Black Laurel," the gesture with which Malglaive lifted his faceted glass to inhale the aroma of this drop of warm, perfumed amber, recalled to me exactly the gay epicureanism he had been used to show at our boyish banquets, when he was eighteen. That he had become the pleasure lover that his youth foretold, I could not doubt. Nor could I doubt, from his brilliant and easy conversation, that political life had been for him solely a means of getting on in the world, a career by means of which to obtain, as quickly as possible, as much pleasure as possible. He had manifested all through dinner, in replying to M. Zaffoni's questions as to the principal men in his own party, that scepticism as of one who is behind the scenes which, to me, is only too familiar. To the old man, all this gossip was so interesting that it explained his infatuation. Who had ever before initiated him thus into the mysteries of our parliamentary backshop? And then, clever as he was, — the dear

and upright old man, — he had no points of comparison in conversation like this. He did not see as I did the type so commonplace and so logical to which this jovial Malglaive belonged: this democrat, with his boldly, impudently, reformatory programmes, who, at heart, believed only in lobbyism, and eagerly drew advantage for himself from the abuses which he denounced on his placards. I am unjust. Malglaive distinguished himself from the others by the breadth of his mental range. I can hear him still expressing, as to the future of the present France, ideas which would scarcely have edified his constituents, yet corresponding too exactly to reality not to charm me, as they manifestly charmed M. Zaffoni.

“I have no illusions in the matter,” Malglaive said; “all this will end, for us, by conferences in Belgium,— for the country, in a Cæsar. At heart, you know, the Frenchman is the Kelt, excitable and imaginative. For a hundred years this imagination was fired with the idea of a Republic. All the distress from which this nation suffered, all the humiliations, all the difficulties, he attributed to the fact that he was not living under a Republic. To-day he is; and he sees that the situation remains unchanged. But he has to go on imagining; he has it in his blood; and being no longer able to crystallize around a word, he will crystallize around a name, and create a Cæsar.”

“I hope not!” interrupted M. Zaffoni; “you have only to look at England in the eighteenth century to see

through what difficulties her parliamentary régime was established. Yours will likewise be established."

"I shall agree with you," Malglaive replied, "when you have surrounded France with the ocean. The English inhabit an island; all their history is explained by this fact, and all ours by our open frontier."

I have written these three or four sentences, out of hundreds of others, as I chance to remember them, because they struck me at the moment as fairly characteristic of Malglaive's superiority over most men of his kind. He was still capable of general ideas and still appreciative of them. There was the sophist, there was the eternal Gorgias, in his way of presenting his points of view; but he was capable of points of view; and is it not possible to be a sophist, and a sceptic, and a lover of pleasure to boot, and still keep one's hands clean from all peculation? And so I gave myself up, during the whole evening, to the pleasure of hearing the old stager of the Corfiote parliament and the young stager of the French Chamber discuss the future of France, and then the future of Europe, without myself giving any further thought to the "Malglaive cheque"—to use the expression of the fighting newspapers. That my enjoyment was sincere did not escape the notice of the sister, and she proved to me the happiness that I had given her by thanking me, in her way, towards the close of the evening, while we were drinking the cool lemonade which M. Zaffoni had made for us himself, with the

fine lemons of the island, using a little silver lemon squeezer bought in Regent Street.

"Clément often used to speak of you, when you and he were schoolmates," said the gentle Antigone to me. "He loved his friends so much. He loves them still, so much. He was not made for political life. He wears himself out in it. He has too much heart for it. My brother is a man of feeling, and not a business man. And so, when he encounters treachery, it is a very hard thing for him. You know what shameful attacks have been made upon him this winter. I persuaded him to take this journey in order to recover a little from the horrible shock. He could not sleep, not on account of the mere fact,—he was too strong in his own innocence,—but to see his colleagues turn against him when he had been so good to them: such treachery was very, very bitter to him!"

Why am I so made that illusions, the most natural in the world,—those of a mother in respect to her son, of a father as to his daughter, of a husband as to his wife, or a wife as to her husband,—always render me very severe towards the person who is their object? Am I not right? To have produced and to maintain this false image of oneself, must not a person have been continuously false in the home life, continuously feigning emotions, displaying a character altogether fictitious? Mlle. Malglaive's extremely touching confidence produced in me, as an instantaneous effect, the

entire restoration of my distrust in this brother, so far unlike the idea that his sister had of him. The prejudices that had remained to me from boyhood—just now almost dissipated by our conversation—took possession of me again with so great force that as I saw his face under the lamp, at the moment of departure, the handsome features appeared to me suddenly invested with a character of evil. He was a fair-haired man with black eyes, and wore a pointed beard. Of a sudden, I seemed to see, in the difference between the colour of his hair and the colour of his eyes, the index of an inborn duplicity, and the same in the difference between his face in front view and in profile. And I shook hands with him at parting, convinced, in spite of the early favourable impressions of the evening, that his accusers had spoken truly. Although this stay in Corfu was not to end until I held in my hands a sure proof of his dishonour, I do not give this sudden change in my opinion as a sign of superior clear-sightedness. I mention it only to make more comprehensible the singular mingling of regret and satisfaction which that indisputable proof gave me. Those whose trade it is to study life somewhat closely are like this,—divided between disgust, sadness, sometimes even terror, at human villainy, and a species of intellectual satisfaction, not unlike that of the astronomer who sees appear, in the field of his telescope, the star which his calculations have predicted.

III

Since that evening a week had passed, which we had employed, as one does, in a visitor's idleness, in making long expeditions through the island. Guided by Plutarch's Englishman,—as I liked to call M. Zaffoni,—these walks left on me an impression very different from that generally made by wanderings of this kind in other countries. Why did I yield, in beginning this sketch, to the common idea which limits to love and its concerns all the poetry of life, and regret that I could associate with the radiant and seductive landscape of Corfu only the figures of an admirable old man, soon to die unknown, a woman of thirty-five, the victim of a most fallacious idolatry, and a pirate, who abused the magnanimous optimism of the one, as he did the profound faith of the other? As memory calls up these incidents, I become aware that the secret antithesis between these peaceful Levantine scenes and the little psychological drama that was performed in my presence gave to my impressions of nature a keenness and, so to speak, a further element of the picturesque. Among these episodes two, at this moment, are distinct almost to hallucination: first, a visit to the green and quiet bay of Ipsos, across the river, the *fiumare* rather, in which legend assumes to recognize the stream described in the Odyssey, on whose bank Nausikaa washed her linen. We had stopped near the sea, under

some old olive-trees, and at the gate of a *Khâni*, whence emerged suddenly, holding by the mane a small black horse, a peasant, who told us his name was Nicolas. He was somewhat intoxicated, in a gentle familiar way. A friendly smile was on his fat good face. "Πάτερ — my father!" he said, approaching M. Zaffoni, and he held out to him a hand well-shaped, though its nails were black with earth. With his long full trousers made of some soft bluish stuff, his coarse white stockings and sandals turning up at the toes, he seemed so happy to be alive, so full of that light, innocent, pagan gayety, ready to break out singing! Finally he got on his horse, sideways, like a woman, and we came upon him later, going along the bank at a foot pace, exchanging jokes, like a shepherd of Theocritus, with a seventeen-years-old girl, named Anticrité, who was standing barefooted on the sand, and as she threw herself back a little from the hips, the suppleness of her coarse linen undergarment showing between the heavy petticoats and the overfull bodice, revealed that adorable grace of the girdle, so much extolled by the ancients. I can still hear Malglaive as he said to M. Zaffoni, pointing to the peasant:

"And you complain of the political life of your country? But there you have the type of the perfect voter!"

"Alas!" the old man answered, "you do not know how well aimed is your sarcasm."

"But it is not sarcasm at all," Malglaive answered, laughing; "the man of the people is never better than when he is in that condition. He is a child, and the bottle is still his most harmless plaything."

"Any one could see," rejoined M. Zaffoni, "that you have the Parisian workman to deal with, the keenest and most lively of men, who keeps his wits even after he has parted with his common sense. But here these natures are so brutish and primitive, intoxication makes them more brutes than before. And it is not infrequent. We have not enough strength to afford to waste even an atom of it."

"Bah!" Malglaive said, "happy the people who have no history."

"Never say it!" broke in the old man with remarkable eagerness. "It is the most criminal of proverbs. Unhappy," he urged, "the people who have no history, for it is a sign they have no ideals, no self-devotion! More unhappy still those who have ceased to have a history."

A few minutes later Mlle. Malglaive was saying to me: "You must not believe Clément when he talks about the people as he did just now. No one loves them more than he. But he has met so much injustice, even in our own district, it embitters him."

She had perceived, blind as she was, that our old friend had spoken with profound faith; and though it was but a very slight falling off in her idol, she was

conscious that the poor Corfiote lawyer was of a higher race than that to which the brilliant Parisian deputy belonged; and so the Antigone awakened. "What fame more brilliant than to have honoured my brother?" she could at any moment have uttered this cry of the Greek sister; and I said to myself, "Such a devotion as that should have been given to a man like Zaffoni, disinherited by fame, and full of genius; and chance has given it, instead, to a common trickster like this Malglaive!" And I accused the irony of fate.

I again accused it, I remember, on the day we visited the Achilleion, the immense palace built by the Empress of Austria, on the heights of Gasturio, with its colonnaded portico, its stuccoed ceilings, its mosaics, its Pompeian frescos, and in the vestibule a giant Achilles, who seeks in vain to withdraw the arrow which has transfixed his heel,—a Germanic symbol of the incurable, the irremovable, in certain griefs. From the foot of the steps, the garden extends down towards the sea. Great red and purple anemones alternate with white and lilac iris, and beds of various coloured roses surround another statue—that of Heine shivering and emaciated in his invalid's chair, while the Ionian waves lift towards him—who would have loved them so—a joyful concert that he will never hear. We had gone down as far as this monument of a touching intellectual piety, and return-

ing towards the palace were looking silently at its closed windows and aspect of desolation, thinking, all of us, I should have supposed, of the besetment which the mysterious empress had hoped here to escape, when Malglaive broke the silence to cry out:

"What splendour, and how it is wasted! Do you know, Monsieur Zaffoni, it would make the fortune of the island, if some one would buy this building and this garden, which her Majesty is already tired of, and simply make it a gambling house, another Monte Carlo?"

"Do not say that publicly," replied the old man, laying his hand on the other's arm. "*Be persuaded* that this has been thought of already. Alas!" he continued, "the place is even now so spoiled. This palace, to me who can remember the little house that once stood here, is a barbarism, and, worst of all, a neurotic barbarism. The house? It was a little place built in the last century by a rich Venetian, for use in the hot weather. It was not very imposing,—a kind of *patio* with a tank in the centre, a few rooms opening upon a gallery resembling a cloister, and a terrace with lemon-trees. But climbing plants covered the walls with flowers, and when I used to come here, at the age of twenty-five, to see a friend who spent his summers here, we passed delicious afternoons with our day-dreams. And what dreams they were! The foreigner driven out of Greece; our whole country free and regenerated! I declare to you that if I knew a gambling house was established in this place,

and that the men of Athens had consented to it, the men of Athens!" he repeated, "I should die of shame!"

"What enthusiasm still in that heart of eighty!"

Mlle. Malglaive said to me, recurring, two days later, to this scene. I had gone to pay her a visit, and I had learned that she and her brother were to leave for Italy by the next day's steamer. I had found her alone, and had been glad of this, hoping that I might read a little further in this heart all self-devotion, and, at moments, I had an impression that she vaguely suspected the folly of her sacrifice, and that her idol did not merit this constant fervour. Without doubt she had been hurt anew by the contrast between her brother's joking vulgarity and the resolute ardour of the old Greek patriot so faithful to his early faith, even now that he was undeceived. Who knows? Did she foresee that this would one day be her own attitude? And she continued: "No one does more justice to M. Zaffoni than Clément. He amuses himself, as he did the other day, in maintaining paradoxes, so that M. Zaffoni may become eloquent. He said to me, when we came back from the palace of the Empress, 'What a pity that such an admirable implement should not have been used!'"

She was silent for a minute: I perceived that an idea had just occurred to her; her eyelids quivered more nervously, and with a kind of solemnity, which her offer was later to explain to me, she resumed: "Will you promise me that you will keep a secret?" And on my reply in

the affirmative, she continued: "My brother has said nothing to you about some work that he has been doing here—a paper that is to appear in two parts, the first and fifteenth of next month, in one of the great French reviews?"

I said, no.

"I think it is because he means it to be a surprise for your friend," she resumed. "It is a picture of the political history of the Ionian Islands, from 1814 to 1864. You will see how he speaks of M. Zaffoni. You will see, too, how rapidly he can assimilate a subject. We have been here only five weeks, and with a few visits to the Archives of the city, and some notes furnished by M. Zaffoni himself, my brother has prepared this admirable paper. Oh, it will be a grand success for him on his return, and it will make his rivals see clearly that they have not done with him yet! It is especially the ideas which are strong. There is an analysis of the parliamentary régime in the different nations of Europe, after the Napoleonic wars. It is admirable. I should like"—she stopped, colouring to the roots of her hair, which was blonde like her brother's, but already faintly silvered here and there. "Yes, I should like to have you read the proofs. You can send them back to me in an envelope in the morning. But you must be sure to keep the secret," she repeated, with a pleasant smile of complicity; "you know, he would scold me. Clément has a horror of seeming to solicit praise. How often I have

reproached him for not showing himself just as he is! He would calumniate himself sooner, he so hates to boast. It is the least those can do who love him—to make him known in his real superiority, in his real self, though in your case there is no need.”

Oh! the refined, noble creature, trembling at the action, as if it were a fault which she was about to commit unknown to her brother, for that brother's sake. These last words, “though in your case there is no need,” she had spoken with a kind of imploring grace which proved too much to me. She feared, on the contrary, that I had judged Malglaive severely from the words I have narrated, which revealed brutal ways of feeling, incompatible with a fine flower of delicacy. When she gave me the package of proof her hand, as I touched it, was icy from the reflux of blood to her tender heart. I experienced, in seeing her so moved, an actual remorse that I had not concealed even more completely the unfavourable effect produced upon me by certain expressions of the suspected politician. I had certainly tried to conceal it, and I was so sure that I had succeeded! But will any one ever deceive a woman as to one's own feelings towards the being she loves in a certain sad and impassioned way—be it son or husband, brother or father? These affections, so honourable, so loyal, so lofty, develop in those who are possessed by them something like a preternaturally acute perception of esteem; and, through all my reserve and watchfulness over

myself, Christine Malglaive divined the truth that I did not esteem her brother as much as she desired that I should.

I carried the proof to M. Zaffoni's house. Have I said that he would not suffer me to lodge elsewhere than with him? I began to look over the slips with the idea that I should find one of those amplifications in which our politicians excel: a few facts scattered here and there, a positivist phraseology assuming to be scientific theory, impudent affirmations in respect to insoluble problems, —such are the habitual ingredients in these sorts of mixtures. However, I knew that Malglaive had been in communication with the memoirs of my host: "At least his facts will be accurately given," I concluded. But when I began reading from the first pages of this paper, entitled, "A Lesson in Parliamentary Wisdom: The English in the Ionian Islands," I was astonished at the vigorous simplicity of the work. There was in the narration that concentrated strength, and in the reflections thrown in at different points that vigorous clearness, which reveal a mind saturated with its subject. The picture of Europe on the morrow of Napoleon's downfall was drawn after the manner of Thucydides, in that style where every epithet tells. One portrait especially, that of the Corfiote Capo d'Istria at the Vienna Congress, made me cry out, "But he could not have written this!" I stopped reading. A horrible suspicion seized upon me: could Malglaive have stolen

outright that page from M. Zaffoni's memoirs, without even naming him? I remember the moment. The idea startled me so that I repulsed it at once as too abominable. To the man whose trade is literature, plagiarism always appears very culpable. It is a crime against professional honour, like a soldier's desertion or a business man's forgery. In the particular case such a plagiarism was even worse. During the few weeks of his stay in Corfu, Malglaive had been able to measure the immense disproportion between career and merit that fate had inflicted upon M. Zaffoni. He was not unaware that this man of uncommon ability had never had, in the eighty years of his long life, his *one hour*, his hour for battle and victory. He knew that this work upon Corfu was the extremely modest and touching last appeal of this great soul against the injustice of fame. Was it to be believed possible that he could have been willing to defraud the old man of a portion of his posthumous success, however small might be the portion, and however evanescent the success itself? If Malglaive were indeed capable of this, what was to be believed of him in that already suspicious past, where his sole guarantee of innocence was his personal honour, that need of his own self-respect, that last irreducible instinct which prevents us from falling below a certain point? There could be no doubt, if he had copied M. Zaffoni without naming him in the given circumstances, that point was passed!

There was a too simple way of ascertaining the truth. I was so disturbed that I employed it at once without asking myself whether it was or was not a violation of my agreement with Mlle. Malglaive, that promise of secrecy which, after all, was made only concerning Malglaive himself. But I have no doubt that even a more general promise would have failed to prevent me from doing the perfectly natural thing that I did, and in the way that I did it. I picked up the slips just as they lay, open upon my table, and went to knock at the door of the library. I found M. Zaffoni standing at the tall desk which he habitually used when at work. He could never write seated. The neatly cut pages of manuscript, with the fine, clear writing and the numerous erasures, testified to the assiduous labour of the recent hours, a cloudy sky having kept him indoors that day.

"You see me occupied," he said, "with these interminable memoirs. I ought to have them completed shortly, for, at my age, every day, every hour almost, is a respite. I have just now heard of the sudden death of one of my contemporaries, Dr. Andonis Zacharopoulos. I can truly apply to myself the words of the philosopher: *Singulas dies, singulas vitas puta*. But are you bringing me something of your own to read? That will be a much better use of my time."

"No," I said, "this is not mine. And it is exactly about your memoirs that I want to speak to you. These are the proofs of an important paper upon the Parlia-

ment of the Ionian Islands which Malglaive is going to publish."

"Ah, the secretive fellow!" interrupted my host; "why did he not tell me about it?"

"I am much afraid that the cause of his silence is not very creditable to him," I replied. "You have allowed him to have your manuscript, and I think I discover from the style, the ideas, from a certain something which does not resemble him, that he has borrowed from you sentences, perhaps even pages, without acknowledgment. Now, this portrait of Capo d'Istria. Listen."

As I read aloud the passage whose authorship had seemed most manifest to me, I could see the old man's serene face grow troubled and sorrowful. His eyes, usually so luminous with courage and calmness, were veiled with a moisture that gathered at last in two large tears, the only ones I had ever seen roll down his wrinkled cheeks. This unexpected sign of his extreme emotion made me stop, fearing that I was causing him too great suffering. Very soon I understood that magnanimous pity had wrung from him a mark of weakness which he would never have shown if it had been but a matter concerning himself only.

"Give me that proof," he said, and, taking the slips in order, he began to run over them with that rapid glance of an author rereading his own composition in his thoughts quite as much as on the paper. From time to time I heard him say: "It is exact. It is exact."

Finally he laid the slips down on the desk, pushing them away with a gesture of ill-concealed disgust; then, firmly, he said: "It has all been taken. You hear me—all! There are not a hundred lines of his own in the whole fifty pages. The unfortunate man!"

"The unfortunate man? Say, rather, the scoundrel!" I cried. "This infamous act condemns him; if he is capable of baseness like this, can you doubt now that he did the thing of which he was accused? This time, at least, he shall not complete his vile deed! I will disgrace him publicly, unless he withdraws the article. You will give me so much of your memoirs as you have now ready, and within the fortnight it shall be in print on the first page of the most important newspaper in Paris! Oh, the scoundrel, the scoundrel!"

"You forget Mlle. Malglaive," interrupted M. Zaffoni, seriously; "and, first, that you had promised her secrecy. You had not the right to show me these proofs; I had no right to read them." In the presence of my excitement he had recovered his admirable serenity and, with that irresistible gentleness which emanated from him when he wished to convince: "Be persuaded," he continued, "that if ever she were to suspect this unworthy act of her brother's, she would at once draw the inference that you have drawn,—that I, myself, cannot avoid. She would believe Malglaive guilty in the affair of the cheque, if she knew him guilty in this matter. My dear child," he said, and the gravity of his tone deepened to solemnity,

"my memoirs are my own, are they not? I order you, understand me, I *order* you to be silent. — What was it that I desired?" he resumed. "That our efforts—the efforts of us, Corfiote patriots—should receive public testimony? They will receive it. That certain truths as to parliamentary government should be spoken? They will be spoken. As for me, I only need to put it in my will that these memoirs shall be published after I have been dead sixty years, and justice will then be done to me. But, for a matter of personal vanity, shall I break this noble creature's heart, a heart already crushed because men doubt her brother's honour? No, I should lose my self-respect if I were to do such a thing."

"And you are going to let this fellow make a new reputation for himself with these articles?" I rejoined, with unabated violence. "You will endure seeing under his name, in the newspapers of Paris, extracts from your own work?"

"It must be," replied the old man; "and I who know you defy you to say that I am wrong, after you see the poor girl again. I defy you to act otherwise than I am doing. And besides, remember, we must leave to life the care of avenging us: life will do it only too surely."

IV

Pathetic memories! How they have flowed in upon me while I have been listening, across the years, to that voice now for ever silent! And how I approve myself to-

day that I listened to that compassionate advice which kept me silent as to what I knew, that I might spare the deceived sister, that sublime Antigone of an unworthy brother! And I returned the proof to her without denouncing Malglaive's shameful plagiarism; and I heard her praise the talent of this pirated essay; and I replied, on my part, with eulogiums; and I clasped the hand of my old schoolmate when we parted, as if nothing at all were wrong. The magnanimous victim of this abominable literary theft had set me the example. Yes; how could I help being grateful to my old friend for this effort which he compelled me to make in subduing my first impulse of indignation? Otherwise how could I have had that double vision which I keep in my thoughts of Christine Malglaive and of himself, relieved against the afternoon sky of the day of departure, like two classic figures? I see her again, leaning against the railing of the steamer, just off for Brindisi, saluting our skiff with her hand; pale, smiling, and following us with a look in which we could both, M. Zaffoni and myself, read her thanks for the sympathy we had shown her brother during their stay. Tender and pure and faithful, never dreaming what we had done for her! And I can hear my companion say to me:

"Do you think the pleasure of claiming one's right to a hundred pages, were they even (which they are not) as fine as Plutarch's or Macaulay's, is worth bringing sadness to those eyes and to that heart?"

And himself—the indulgent sage, whose fine amenity hid a constancy so resolute—him I again see, on that same day, walking in the twilight in the funeral procession of the Dr. Andonis, whose death he had told me of. He had said to me: “Place yourself at the library window to see the procession pass. Our funeral ceremonies are curious.” And I was there at the window as the funeral train went along the esplanade. There was a certain pallor in the sky which deprived of colour the sea, the hills, the trees, and the Maltese stone of which is built the palace of the Lord High Commissioner, with the galley of Corcyra on its façade. The chanting of the priests was beautiful and sad. The materials of these priests’ robes, with their shades of old blue, of peach-blow pink, of faded orange, of a dull red, shared in the general colourlessness of the evening, in which the flames of the wax candles burnt faintly, and seemed rather lighted up than themselves giving light. The dead man lay in his coffin, borne on the shoulders of his relatives, adorned with flowers, his face uncovered, a face pallid and yellow, as of a mummy promised to earth. A burial at this late hour always gives me a pang, as a more rapid entry into the Great Night. But this melancholy was suddenly transformed into admiration at sight of M. Zaffoni in the crowd, walking bareheaded in the first row. The august serenity of the old man, himself so near being borne, with the same ceremonial, to the same funereal shelter, ex-

plained itself to me completely. He had for many years acted always — as I had seen him act a few hours before — as a man compassionate towards other men. It must be that the influence of peace emanating from that calm face is still sovereign over my soul, for I forget, in its presence, all my wrath against the miserable plagiarist upon whom life has not yet avenged his generous victim. The episode of the cheque is forgotten; the two articles upon the Ionian Parliament, put together in a pamphlet, have had great success, and only this morning I read in a newspaper that there is talk of a Malglaive combination for the next cabinet! To console myself, I think of the sister whom I have not had the courage to see again, to be the more sure that I should have no share in undeceiving her; and I repeat to myself those two beautiful lines — of the same poet who wrote the “Antigone” — which my Corfiote host was so fond of quoting:

“These things are hard, Proone, I confess. Yet it must be
That these decrees of God we mortals should endure with
patience.”

II

TWO MARRIED COUPLES

II

TWO MARRIED COUPLES

I

I WAS in America that winter, and though but very few years have passed since then,—scarcely three,—the difference of atmosphere between this side of the ocean and the other is so great that, as I call up, here in my quiet Parisian apartment, the memory of that recent time, the impression I receive is like returning in a dream to a remote, phantasmagoric past. But at that moment, in February, 1894, acclimated by seven months' stay in the country, and completely possessed by the eager interest of entirely new observation, it was Europe—old, retrograde Europe—that had grown misty and remote, as in a dream. An unpractical man of letters, suddenly flung into the central whirlpool of a maddening activity, the American fever literally intoxicated me. All imaginative natures are familiar with this feeling, which is due to suggestion, and associates us for the moment, with a frenzy of infatuation that later is inexplic-

able, with forms of existence contrary to our own inmost nature, precisely because they are thus different. At the period of which I speak it was neither the authors, nor the artists, nor the philosophers of America that interested me to that degree. It was the business men, those prodigious handlers of money, who are almost all self-made, having in ten or twenty years conquered, with their own hands, fortunes and power comparable only to those of feudal lords in the Middle Ages. These railway magnates, who own eight hundred, a thousand, twelve hundred miles of road; these potentates of oil, of silver, or of copper mines, whose profits are like a king's income; these Napoleons of building, who construct at will, in a desert, cities of a hundred thousand souls—these are the persons whom I approached with the intellectual delectation of a naturalist who should behold living and moving in his presence some one of the great saurians of the world before the flood. These specimens of the conqueror, reappearing in such modern conditions of industrial warfare, and in this stage-setting all made up of contrasts, with its extremely refined civilization and its utter barbarism side by side, gave me, by the mere fact of their existence, singularly intense intellectual gratification. When I returned from the United States, this was the one among my Yankee enthusiasms upon which my friends bantered me the most. I am the less likely to repent of it, since without this pleasure in

observing at close range some specimens of these all but beggars become billionaires, I should never have witnessed the moral drama which I propose to relate, whose pathetic element, mingled with its grotesque, haunts me often as being a symbol of the strange antitheses of an *outré-mer*.

And so it happened that I had become intimate with a certain Tennyson R. Harris — among other saurians of speculation — a man whom his poetic Christian name did not hinder from being one of the most distinguished financiers in a country where they are past counting. But to explain how I became so well acquainted with this man that, about the beginning of February, 1894, I made a long journey in his company, I must first relate how I came to know him in the preceding August. I had just arrived in New York, bringing a letter of introduction to his wife which a lady of my acquaintance in Paris had given me. My friend had said to me: "I have never seen the husband, he is a barbarian, a brute, a Yankee *pur sang*, it seems, who detests Europe. But she, you will find, has read everything, understands everything, knows all there is to know. In short, she is a true Parisian. How is it that you have never met her?" This description — shall I confess it? — had not been reassuring. I have never particularly liked the *Parisiennes* of Paris, in the sense in which my interlocutrice employed the word; and as to *Parisiennes* in foreign lands — that

counterfeit of a counterfeit, I can scarcely forgive them for having spoiled by their invitations so many fine journeys that I shall never make again. And yet, as soon as I landed, I went with the letter to Mrs. Harris. The shock which I received on landing on the wooden pier at New York had been too severe, and I yielded to the desire of meeting a person with whom to talk of that Paris I had quitted so light-heartedly. O contradictions of the mania for travel! I can see myself now, stepping out of a cab, on a scorching afternoon, at the upper end of Fifth Avenue, before an edifice of white marble, in the style of the château de Blois, which had been indicated to me as the millionaire's dwelling; and paying the cabman two dollars—a little more than ten francs—for less than an hour's drive. And what insolence was expressed on the clean-shaven lip of this man as he pocketed this tax on the foreigner! And how stifling the New York summer sky, how oppressive the air! How incoherent seemed to me the splendours of the improvised architecture along this avenue, and how formidable the speed of the trains passing in the distance over the open scaffolding of the elevated railway! What an exile! And how alone I felt myself,—so alone that to learn of the absence from town of Mrs. Tennyson R. Harris, her departure for her villa at Newport, was an added misfortune! I should think differently to-day.

This absence was, I am inclined to believe, the determining cause which led me to go myself almost immediately to the American Deauville; and I see myself again, six days after my first mishap, stepping out of another cab before another palace also of marble like the first, but situated on Narragansett Avenue in Newport; paying three dollars this time for a fifteen minutes' drive; and, lastly, taking the same envelope out of my letter case. Merely to look at the handwriting on this envelope renewed the nostalgia I had felt in New York. Alas! If I had counted upon the châtelaine of this colossal marble toy to give me back the sensation of slow, gentle, idle France, how deceived I had been! Mrs. Harris received me in a kind of glass boudoir, looking seaward, in which I found, it is true, the image of some of the drawing-rooms that I love best in Cannes; but it was an image that became a parody by excessive imitation, a caricature by its extravagance. Too many paintings and engravings loaded the too rich material of the walls; flowers, too many and too large, were shedding their leaves in too costly vases; too many little objects of English silver glittered on the tables, amid too many photographs of princes and princesses—all with inscriptions. And herself, Mrs. Harris, she was almost too beautiful, her lips too red, her teeth too well brushed, her hands too carefully manicured, with their extravagance of rings; and she wore a summer toilette so extremely stylish that

she seemed a dressmaker's advertisement, a living doll which some clever costumer had adorned for exportation. Before she had talked with me fifteen minutes I became aware that she was too well informed, too much up-to-date, really too Parisian, knowing too well that Mme. de A. is about to break with M. de B., that the C.-D.'s are ruined, that they would like to marry their daughter to the son of old E., notwithstanding the infamous origin of the fortune,—in short, all the gossip which is retailed simultaneously in all the villas of Deauville, Dieppe, or Fontainebleau. The French novel, whose leaves she was cutting with a tortoise-shell knife incrustated with roses, had not yet appeared in the booksellers' windows at the time when I left Paris. This paper-knife, the last creation of a jeweller in the Rue de la Paix, would be the knickknack of to-morrow. This European veneer with which Mrs. Harris and the house were invested would not have been complete without the arrival in the drawing-room, during my visit, of a personage, himself attired in London, with an incomparable perfection of Anglomania, with his button-hole bouquet, his well-shaved, ridiculous face of the serious buffoon, in that well-known rôle of the man of fashion engaged in an intrigue, coming daily to be on view in the drawing-room of his prize.

"Was it worth while to affront thee, O incorruptible Ocean?" I sighed in the presence of the sea, going away from this marble château, already the slave of an invita-

tion to dinner "to meet" the All-Newport of the Season. "Yes, was it worth while?" And I followed the superb promenade, which lies along the cliff, and looked down upon the vast, moving abyss on which I had passed a week of half-gales, to arrive in America and to learn that the supreme effort of this indefatigable young democracy is to copy in caricature all the intellectual and moral worthlessness of the Old World!

It was, however, at this dinner, whose imitative stupidity I reviled in advance, that I met the first among the major generals of American finance who interested me passionately, — Mr. Tennyson R. Harris himself. And what a dinner, suited to disgust one forever with luxury, by its incredible abuse! The flowers alone — those roses called American Beauty, which must have cost a dollar apiece — represented the entire annual expenditure of many small property-holders in France. Silver-gilt plate followed silver; a dinner service of Dresden china worthy of a museum followed a service of Sèvres in green and gold with the imperial arms. A portrait of Louis XVI. and one of Marie-Antoinette, with the classic inscriptions *Donné par le Roy*, *Donné par la Reyne*, appeared upon the walls, hung with Spanish leather of exceptional magnificence. The twenty-four guests *were worth*, collectively, so a young French diplomat who was there said to me, two hundred million dollars. And all the women's toilettes were, like that of Mrs. Harris, at whose right I had been hospitably placed, — of such an improbable

impersonality, so faultlessly Parisian was every one, that it seemed to be the result of a wager. On these white, or palest amber-hued shoulders, and in the dark or fair hair, sparkled diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, rubies, as large as one's finger-nail, pearls as big as walnuts, the treasure of many rajahs. These beautiful women had complexions that betrayed hours of outdoor life; they drank dry champagne, laughing and talking very loud, with that faint nasal tone in pronunciation which gave to all this talk, thus heard at once in this stately dining-room, the sonority of a chatter of exotic birds growing excited within some immense cage.

Meanwhile, opposite the mistress of the house, at the other end of the table, a man was seated, of pitiable aspect, not old, a face gray and leaden, the mouth tight closed with an expression of bitterness, the brown eyes dull, with frightful lassitude in them, the fatigue of a mental tension lasting eighteen hours a day, during thirty-five years. Mr. Harris, for he it was, must have received from nature the constitution of an athlete; his broad shoulders and full neck, his powerful hands and jaw like a mastiff's, revealed a temperament which had been equal to an evidently superhuman expenditure of energy. Now, not yet fifty years of age, he was foundered—like a blood horse after a headlong race. I had already heard it whispered everywhere that he suffered from one of those mysterious maladies—for which the American doctors have a dozen new names every year—which are simply

the penalty for a life of "hard work" of which a European would die in a few months. This state of "nervous exhaustion," as the phrase is, was the sole explanation of Mr. Harris's presence in his Newport house. He had never been there for longer than forty-eight hours at a time—from Saturday night till Monday morning—before this crisis of overwork from which he was suffering that season. Now, by way of exception, he was allowing himself a week's rest. I sat opposite to him, and his blank look seemed to receive no impression from this enormous display—his work, however; his own affair. A bit of toast, a morsel of roast meat and a glass of mineral water—this was his entire dinner that evening; and while the lady at my side busied herself in continuing for me her *chronique galante du Gotha*, I remember I was asking myself:

"What is this singular man thinking about? He must be a man of intellect, since he has conquered so many rivals in the fierce strife of business in this country. What is the meaning of this continuous effort, touched by death as he already is? He has not a year to live. He is abstemious as a Bedouin of the desert. He has no time for a mistress.—He seems so simple. What does he care to do? To make a display? He is dressed like a clerk. To entertain? He is never here. To pet his wife? If he were in love with her, he would not let her run away to Europe for eight months at a time, and he would be jealous of her admirer.

What would I not give to be able to overhear the silent words that are spoken at this moment, behind that pallid brow!"

II

My reason for narrating these impressions, which are not particularly original, considering that the scene is laid in the United States—that prodigious paradox, stretched out from the Atlantic to the Pacific, under the form of sixty million inhabitants—has been given already; it is because my first meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Harris forms an anticipative but indispensable commentary upon the episode at which I now arrive.

Seven months had passed, then, since my presentation to "the charming woman, so Parisian," and her "brute of a husband." I had seen Mrs. Harris but three or four times; in fact, she had departed for Europe immediately after the Horse Show was over, the *Concours Hippique* of New York. On the other hand, I had roughed out a semi-friendship with Mr. Harris; that is to say, I had, under his guidance, visited from top to bottom the Harris Building, a colossal edifice of eighteen stories, reared at the foot of Broadway near the Battery, by an insurance company which he had founded. I had gone over with him, in detail, all the offices of his railway; he had taken me to see, at four hours' distance from New York, the buildings of a Woman's College, created and endowed by himself; he had invited me to meet at

dinner some public men of his party, including his candidate for the approaching presidential election; and we had witnessed, at one of his farms, the arrival of some Western horses, sent on from one of his ranches.

In short, he had initiated me into his manifold activities, with that good humour at once jocose and vain, so peculiar to the true American, who delights to give you an object-lesson in his own person, even though he may become displeased if you do not take him as he wishes to be taken. Doubtless Mr. Harris had been content with the docile interest testified by my slightly frivolous Gallo-Roman ignorance, for, in the month of February, knowing that I intended to visit the Southern States, he proposed to me in a very off-hand way to travel with him in his private car and by his special train as far as the little city of Thomasville in Georgia, where his physician had ordered him to breathe the air of the pine woods for a fortnight.

"I am broken down," he said; "when a man is young he has too much strength for his work, and when he is old, he has too much work for his strength. The doctor would like to have me hire a yacht and go to the Pacific islands. Forty days without telegraph or telephone would be delightful. But business, meantime?"

"You have made dollars enough to have the right to rest," I said.

He turned up his nose with a mock air of disgust that was habitual to him, without making any reply to

my little remark, which I had made intentionally. Ladies of Mrs. Harris's acquaintance had told me that her expenditure exceeded two hundred thousand dollars a year; and, on the other hand, I had, during my stay in America, frequently heard Harris's rivals prognosticate disaster to many of his colossal enterprises. I was depending upon our journey together to give me at least some light upon this singular man. Manifestly, he was killing himself at his work—with what feeling towards the wife, whose insane luxury was supported by his persistent labour?

But neither that day nor during the forty-eight hours that we spent in his parlour car, in company with two other guests, a Mr. Julius W. Kingsley and a Mr. Alfred Beaumont, two parasites invited to make up the poker party each evening, did the millionaire day-labourer allow one single sentence to escape him whereby his emotional nature could be guessed. How singular is the recollection which I retain of those hours, of my little stateroom, provided with incredible minutiae of comfort, the bathroom adjacent, the dining-room where we met to enjoy the delicious terrapin prepared by a black cook in the accompanying car, larger than our own, devoted to the kitchen and the servants! The Pennsylvanian landscapes one after another, then the Alleghany Mountains, then the two Carolinas, defiled past the windows of our car. It stopped, by night, at little way-stations, on a siding, to give us opportunity to sleep. By day, in our re-

volving chairs, we read the papers brought us on the express-trains. The huge express would come past our little train, slackening its speed for a moment, and a brakeman would throw us out a package of all the day's papers of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Cincinnati. A library of two hundred volumes attested by its selection the perseverance with which the lord and master of this private car laboured, in the forced leisure of his journeys, at that great task of *culture* — the word that Americans have forever on their lips and in their thoughts, applying it with equal seriousness to ethics and to gymnastics, *ethical and physical culture*. There was not a second-rate book among these works, which nearly all related to historical or philosophic research. The choice of Shakespeare alone, among poets, and of Thackeray alone, among novelists, revealed that exclusiveness of taste which is the true mark of superiority in a man whose hours for reading are to this degree limited.

"That is so," Mr. Harris said to me, when I questioned him as to this choice; "that's my poet and that's my novelist. When I have thoroughly mastered them, I shall read others. Madam," — it was thus that he always spoke of Mrs. Harris, — "Madam knows all the new writers. You saw that she had read everything. She keeps up with the times. But I have all kinds of dyspepsia, and literary dyspepsia is the hardest to cure of any."

Was he scoffing at "Madam," when he spoke thus?

Was he admiring her? Was it with irony, or with respect, that he picked out in the newspapers, as he did several times during this journey, the notes of "Social Gossip" which mentioned the success of Mrs. Harris at Cannes, where she was passing the season? I remember that he brought me, the second or third day after our arrival in Georgia, a paper containing a cablegram with this fabulous heading: "Our Mrs. Harris always the leader in society. Mrs. Vincent plays second fiddle." Then followed details of a performance given in honour of a reigning prince, with the assistance of the first artists from the Théâtre Français. Mrs. Harris had ordered them from Paris — by special train, she, also — paying each performer four thousand dollars, to give the "Visite de Noces" before the Royal Highness. This was her reply to a fête in honour of the same prince given by Mrs. Vincent, another American millionaire, on board a yacht. The latter had sent to Paris for a Café-Concert singer, paying an enormous price for a few songs, in the afternoon. But Mrs. Harris — *our* Mrs. Harris had been victorious!

"Yes, Madam always has had a great feeling for art," her husband said to me; "but I know nothing at all about it. I can tell when an actor is, upon the stage, the same that the kind of man he represents would be in real life. That's all. I know enough also to see whether a painting resembles the object that it represents. But Madam is a great judge of these things. It

was she who brought M. de Reszké and Madame Duse into fashion with us. Her rooms were full of your impressionist pictures, while you in Paris were still disputing about them. And then she has a talent for entertaining. I always tell her she ought to have been the wife of an ambassador or a prince. But as to me, when I am not ill, after having been at work all day, an armchair at the club, a pipe of Virginia tobacco, two or three glasses of Kentucky whiskey and soda, 'and the goose hangs high,' as they used to say when I was a boy."

He quoted to me this proverb (which I can neither translate nor explain), by which Americans express extreme felicity, while walking, with his tired step, at my side on a beautiful morning in that Georgian winter which was as mild as spring. We came out of the hotel, the Mitchell House, an immense wooden building with a veranda and colonnettes, in the colonial style, with the intention of going into the woods. Around us, along the one street of the town, were little board huts occupied by negroes. Black children, half nude, were playing like little animals about the doorways of these huts, where were seated men and women, whose gay, childish smile spoke of indolence. The turpentine pines in the distance rose, dark, serried, slightly stirred by the warm wind which, from the Gulf of Mexico, not far away, sweeps over this immense plateau covered with trees, the growth of centuries. White men passed us, young fel-

lows of twenty, with faces already as hard as at fifty years of age, — men of fifty, with manner still as resolute as at twenty. I looked at Mr. Harris, thinking that he was indeed a brother of these rough pioneers, who had come to this remote corner of Georgia to make, or to remake, their fortunes. Only yesterday he had no more money, no more education, than they. Again I felt how profoundly, intensely American he was. In contrast, came up before me those villas at Cannes, and all that idle, cosmopolitan existence which his wife was leading on the shore of that blue sea, on that Cornice where princes and adventurers pell-mell vie with each other in ostentatious prodigalities. The fête to which the newspaper alluded came before my mind even in its minutest details. I was present in thought at this performance which had cost more than twenty thousand dollars, gotten up to humiliate a rival, paid for by a cheque which the plebeian hand of this ill-dressed man, my companion, had signed. How rough and strong it was, this hand which, at the moment, was bestowing the paper in the pocket of his top-coat, with particular care, as if Mr. Harris were anxious to preserve this proof, after a thousand others, of his wife's European triumphs! It was a hand with knotty fingers, corded with muscles, hairy, with square nails; and the energy of an iron will was betrayed in its slightest gestures. How many plans of contracts it had turned over, that hard hand; how many figures it had made; how many documents of sale

and of purchase it had signed! A gratified vanity made it thrill, and with it the man's whole nature, at the idea of that projection of power by which, after all, the husband of Mrs. Harris reigned, in his own fashion, over that aristocracy of the Old World, into which he would never enter, but where he was making his wife reign! Or was it that this solid realist despised the colossal, vain attempt to occupy a place on the Olympus of international snobbery, whose most apparent result was this newspaper paragraph, forgotten as soon as read?

III

It is probable that I should never have replied even in the vaguest manner to this question, but for a chance meeting which apparently had no bearing whatever on the enigmatic married life of Mrs. Harris, if, indeed, the term is applicable to conjugal relations like these: a cablegram once a week, and once in two months a letter two pages long! One morning, as we went forth anew for our walk under the pines, we had the opportunity of reading, affixed to the glazed wall of the office of the hotel, an announcement that a certain "Mr." and a certain "Mrs. John Hope" would give, that evening, a performance in the public hall of the house. These sorts of entertainments are of daily occurrence in American hotels, and neither Mr. Harris nor myself would have noticed the one in question, had not the name of the woman and the name of the man been each

accompanied by an epithet, and had not these two epithets been mutually contradictory to a degree astonishing even to an unastonishable Yankee: Mr. John Hope was announced as "a contortionist," and Mrs. Hope as "an elocutionist."

"The husband, perhaps, accompanies with contortions the recitations of the wife," I said to Mr. Harris, who turned up his nose anew in replying:

"Well, at any rate, it will be as good as to hear 'Lohengrin,' with the chorus in German, the tenor in French, and the prima donna in Italian!"

We had been present together in the opera house in New York, at the polyglot performance to which the millionaire referred with his quiet sarcasm. Madam had been, you may be sure, one of the great patronesses of this theatre, where the most admired European artists had conversed thus, each in his native tongue. But that musical Babel was much less strange than was the appearance of the Hope couple as they presented themselves that evening—at precisely nine o'clock, dinner being just ended—before the inmates of the hotel.

As is usual, in the United States, the hall of the hotel was a kind of drawing-room carefully arranged by the landlord's wife—a lady who dined near us every evening in the restaurant, in full toilette, accompanied by her husband also in evening dress. A crimson carpet covered the floor of this fashionable vestibule;

paintings and framed photographs adorned the walls. There were low bookcases filled with books. Everywhere in Chinese vases there were the fresh and vigorous flowers of the Georgia woods: dishevelled branches of a honeysuckle which grows there like an immense shrub, violets as large as pansies, roses as tall as those which adorn Newport dinner tables. Cushions of soft silk were tied with ribbons to the backs of rocking-chairs and armchairs. Here a bit of embroidery, there a piece of silk gracefully draped, manifested the refined taste of the young mistress of the hotel, who, that evening, was present among her guests to do honour to the performance (which was to be followed by a dance) quite as if we had not been boarding in her house at our six, ten, fifteen, or twenty dollars a day. With the sole exception of Mr. Harris, who, in his wife's absence, never dressed for dinner, every person present in the hall, man or woman, was in evening dress, and — as at Newport — I had, in listening to the chatter of this assembly while awaiting the arrival of "the contortionist" and "the elocutionist," the same impression of its being an immense aviary, up to the moment when Mr. and Mrs. Hope made their entry, which I should not dare to call sensational. And yet!

Mr. Hope was clad in a shabby clown's dress of blue satin — faded, rather than pale. This material, soiled by the dust of many preceding performances, hung in ungraceful folds around his meagre form. There was

not that living sinuousness of tights, which makes the slightest gesture of the equilibrist and the juggler statuesque. To judge by his wasted fingers, his wrinkled neck and his hollow cheeks, the clinging silk would have outlined a skeleton, if the poor man had been able to buy the elegant *maillot*. He probably was not over thirty-five, but he was so wasted by poverty that his age could be in no way conjectured. Even if his grotesque emaciation had not testified to prolonged physiological distress, the expression of his mouth and of his eyes sufficed to tell of his trials. I afterwards learned from our hostess that he was just recovering from illness. He carried under his arm, as the only thing required in his performance, a magician's robe of brilliant colours which he at once threw over his shoulders, and began a harangue, in a cavernous voice, stepping about nervously, now forward, now back. The soles of his leather shoes, which had been rubbed with resin, marked these steps in white spots on the dark red of the carpet. He continued thus advancing and retreating, delivering in a nasal voice encomiums upon the talent of Mrs. Hope, who had, he said, the genius of Sarah Bernhardt and Ellen Terry combined, and whom he called "the superior protagonist." She, meanwhile, was seated in a chair, in a black dress starred with diamonds, which, if real, would have had a place in jeweller's catalogues with the Regent, the Nassak, the Sancy, and the Koh-i-noor. She fanned sullenly

her fat, heavy face, regular enough as to features, and lighted by two very brown eyes of an aggressive insolence and foolishness. The corners of her mouth had a disdainful droop, and this, with her obstinate chin and the haughtiness of her whole face, revealed a nature whose ruling trait was affectation, as effort, pushed to an extreme of distress, was her husband's characteristic. The contrast between the inmost natures of these two persons appeared as evidently as the contrast between their costumes. How were they going to arrange their performance to have the contortions of the one accompany the recitations of the other?

We had been mistaken, Mr. Harris and myself, as to the way in which the incongruous talents of the Hope couple would be displayed. Of this we were going at once to have proof. But, indeed, was it not enough to observe the stupid pride stamped upon the face of the woman, to comprehend at once her revolt against her husband's having anything to do with the effect that she proposed to produce? The harangue ended, Hope slunk away, and she rose, coming forward a few steps into the space left clear, at the end of the hall, to represent a stage. She extended one arm, and in a voice monotonously, absurdly solemn, began to recite an interminable poem, evidently of her own composition, whose first lines I remember:

“O night, landing, like a negro pirate, in the
blood of the murdered sun,
Loaded with gems blue and white upon thy vesture black —”

and so on, in the same key, with images more and more extreme, metaphors more and more forced, ending at last with a comparison between the fate of the wicked man and the death scene of the said negro pirate in the morning, when the crimson tide from his veins flows, in turn, under the golden sword of the dawn, "the blue-eyed avenger."

These grandiloquent verses, worthy of the worst of Parisian symbolists, were delivered with spasmodic effects of emphasis, abrupt gesticulation, and a cold manner whose chill was even more manifest by reason of the silence of the audience, visibly stupefied by the character of the selection and the manner in which it was rendered. The "vociferatress" — this appellation, which a Parisian crowd used to give during the Revolution to the women who harangued in the streets, was really very appropriate to Mrs. Hope — had, as she took her seat amid a faint applause of courtesy, that irritated look of the unsuccessful actor which is at once pathetic and grotesque. There is in this vexation a spasm of wounded vanity, so puerile, yet so painful! And it was with an almost spiteful look that she watched her husband, now standing in the place that she had just left. With anxious brow and eyes full of that melancholy in which there was as much resignation as there was resolve, the contortionist laid aside his robe, and, with impassive face, clapped his hands, set his legs apart, and sat down in that posture known in the slang of gymnasts as *le grand écart*. He rose again, and again sat down, and then, standing on his

hands, began with his body the most extraordinary series of movements of dislocation which I have ever seen.

"That fellow ought to hire out as an advertisement for an india-rubber company!" And this remark of Mr. Harris, made from the commercial point of view, was really a good way of expressing the extravagant disarticulation of this attenuated body. To see that back give way, those legs bend, that neck fall loose, all this queer dizzy performance go on in one's presence, with a kinetoscopic rapidity and a telegraphic exactness, made you ask yourself whether this really was a creature of flesh and bones, an organic, living animal with vertebræ that had real muscles, with bones that played upon each other; or only a gigantic puppet with a human face, shaken in a factitious epilepsy by some mysterious electric current. To conclude the performance, this strange individual announced that he would give his "decapitation act." Standing erect, with legs well apart, he began to roll his head about, with a movement more and more supple, as if the muscles of the neck were by degrees losing their power to hold it up. Finally the movement became so easy, so automatic, that it seemed as if this head really was an inert object, hanging loosely by strings. A last effort, a fall, a slight movement of the shoulders, and the clown presented his torso in such a manner that he seemed actually headless. It was but for a moment, but the illusion was so perfect in this horrible trick that applause broke out at once all over the

hall. The grotesque monstrosity of the spectacle had in it something tragic, saving it from being hideous, especially before these spectators, American men and women, rendered by their constant familiarity with "sport," as appreciative of a trick's technique as fencers of an admirable thrust. And the most singular exclamations saluted the anomalous talent of the man: "Quite wonderful, isn't it?" "Enchanting!" "Fascinating!" "Lovely!" Nothing in the world less enchanting, less fascinating, less pleasing, than this poor fellow making an invertebrate of himself.

However, this enthusiasm was, after all, very advantageous to him, for, when now he carried around the plate, the quarter-dollars piled up rapidly, with five- and ten-dollar bills among them, and a fifty-dollar note crowned the whole when it came to my companion. Mr. Harris had seemed to follow the contortionist with a singular interest, which did not appear to be diminished when, the collection being ended, the other performer began a second recitation. My neighbour was nearly the only person who listened, for the unlucky woman's voice was immediately drowned by the sound of moving chairs, as every one made haste to go outside for a breath of air. The attractive part of the performance was ended. The elocutionist finished her poem in the presence of six or seven persons only, who bestowed a faint applause. She and her husband bowed to us, and then, in our turn, Mr. Harris and I, in the soft, semi-tropical

night, made our way out into the great garden, where the palms and jasmines quivered in the soft breeze. I can still hear myself saying to him, without any thought of the range of my own words:

"What a queer couple they are—this successful acrobat and this good-for-nothing actress! She seemed to be in a very bad temper. Don't you suppose she is jealous of his success? And don't you think he seemed to admire her, and to be grieved that she got no applause?"

"Hush! here they are," my companion said, touching my arm.

Hope and his wife were just emerging from a path at right angles to ours, the man now wrapped in a long ulster, beneath which showed the legs of his clown's trousers, the woman draped in a black cloak; and they were talking with so much vivacity that they brushed against us unawares. The woman was saying angrily:

"What an evening! What an audience! Never, never will I recite again in a hotel! It is your fault. It is to secure success to your low tricks, that you compel me to appear before these brutes. I hate you, do you hear me? I hate you, you low, contemptible mountebank! I am ashamed of you! Oh, I am so ashamed of you!"

"But we must earn our living, you know," Hope said meekly, with the humble accent of the lover who asks pardon of the woman he loves for being an annoyance to

her while he is dying for her sake. "You never showed more talent than to-night," he added. "But the poem was too fine for them."

IV

The man and woman had passed by us, and I heard my companion say distinctly, looking after them as they walked away, this brief sentence, with a sarcasm in his tone which gave it a strange depth of meaning, "What a slave!" And suddenly I felt that he looked at me to see if this imprudent remark had reached my ear. The night was too dark for him to discern anything in my face; and we continued talking, without referring again to the performers, in whose married life the millionaire had been amused — or saddened — to observe the counterpart of his own.

And to-day, whenever I find in the report of some fête the name of Mrs. Tennyson R. Harris, now two years a widow, that evening in the hotel at Thomasville always comes up before me. Always I see again the contortionist and his wife, and the bitter, questioning eyes of Mr. Harris as he watched them. I hear that complaint, half-jocose, half-unhappy, the only one, perhaps, that he ever uttered, rather that sneer, "What a slave!" and the life drama of the man of business, a slave to his wife's social ambitions as poor Hope was to the artistic ambitions of his wife, and dying of it, also, like Hope, is revealed in all its sadness. Yes, Mr. Harris died, six

or seven months after our journey together, in harness, struck down while seated at his office table. His enemies were right: he left Mrs. Harris no more than three millions, that is to say, an annual income of perhaps a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. Although this revenue is far from equalling the annual expenditure of this charming woman during her husband's lifetime, still it is quite a fortune from a European point of view, and there is talk this winter of her approaching marriage at Cannes to one of the greatest and most ruined of Roman nobles, the Prince d'Ardea of the Castagna family, a grand nephew of Pope Urban VII.

I have omitted to say that on opening Mr. Harris's will it was found that he had left a legacy of fifty thousand dollars to a Mr. John Hope, "by trade a contortionist." The American papers have commented the more on this eccentricity of the eminent financier, inasmuch, as up to the present hour all the researches of the police have been unable to discover either the existence or place of residence of this mysterious legatee. Did the acrobat pursue his career under a fictitious name? Is he also dead? Does he never see a newspaper? Has he fallen into crime and imprisonment? Is he following his strange trade in Australia, in Japan, in Europe? Of all the points of irony in this simple story, is not this the most cruel and the most pathetic, that the millionaire could not enfranchise his slave, and that he sought to do it?

III

NEPTUNE VALE

III

NEPTUNE VALE

I

WHEN one has travelled much, and in all directions, over this world that is so large on the map and in reality is so small, one should not be astonished at any chance encounter. At some point everybody touches everybody. And to-day everybody goes everywhere. The subtle Italian novelist, Luigi Gualdo, somewhere calls by the joking term *fabric* that warp of chance which brings together and weaves in and out, as a thread of one colour with a thread of an opposite colour, destinies madly contrasted. This we know; and, however habituated we may be to the whimsicalities of the cosmopolitan *fabric*, more parti-coloured than all the Harris tweeds of Scotland, we experience a foolish surprise on meeting certain persons in certain places, and in ascertaining that their presence in surroundings so different from usual is even more natural than our own. It is with this kind of a surprise that the adventure begins whose memory haunts me to-day. I am disposed

to relate this adventure — first, to give myself the pleasure, not very consoling, of recurring to a time when I was twelve years younger (this occurred in July, 1885), then, because it belongs to that series of impressions over which hangs a slight mystery, and in respect to which — since they admit of explanations of two sorts, one natural, the other supernatural — there is space for vague imaginings. At the time when I was a witness of these romantic and yet very simple events, they did in fact seem to me very simple, though exceptional. Now that I have grown older and walk surrounded by phantoms of so many friends for ever gone, I like to seek in this episode a shadowy proof that there is between things visible and things invisible, between the living and the dead, an interchange possible of thoughts and influences, — some other tie than merely a powerless regret and a useless memory, even though I may end with a shrug of the shoulders, repeating to myself the sad Irish proverb: "There is hope from the sea, but no hope from the grave."

This graceful, tragic saying of the Irish sailors is all the more appropriate here, because the adventure — since I have given that name to this anecdote — altogether sentimental in character — had for its scene a remote corner of that beautiful island, which is rarely visited by my compatriots, and merits so much to receive their attention. In the month of July, of which I speak, I had just landed there for the second time.

The island had pleased me so much during my first stay, that, having nothing to do with my summer, I had formed the idea of returning thither to gratify my eyes anew with the intense verdure of its landscapes, its rivers of transparent black water, its lakes surrounded by wooded mountains and studded with islands, its lofty cliffs full of the screaming of gulls, its skies always veiled by a soft mist in which lingers the mild breath of the Gulf Stream near by—that warm artery of the formidable Atlantic—with, finally, the inexplicable charm of an absolutely peculiar melancholy. An indescribable pathos seems to enfold that extreme point of Europe, that Ultima Thule, whose fabulous remoteness saddened the sympathetic Vergil, that foggy oasis always in dispute, that fatal limit with nothing beyond, where broke the wave of migrations from the East, and where is prolonged to-day a war of races whose end no man can foresee.

Between 1881, the date of my first visit, and this second arrival, this war of races had been marked by its most dreadful incident—the assassination of Lord Frederick Cavendish and Mr. Burke at the very gates of the capital. Even now, if you are a stranger in Dublin, and if you engage one of those “cars” so fantastically picturesque of aspect, which serve as cabs, there is every chance that the driver will propose to you as the objective point of your drive the scene of this double murder, committed in broad daylight, in

the most frequented avenue of the Park, just outside the city gate. At the time of my visit, which was almost the day after the murder, such a proposition was inevitable. It had been the first suggestion offered by the first cab-driver whom I engaged on leaving the hotel, on the afternoon of the day of my arrival, and I had agreed to the suggestion; so that only a few hours after leaving the steamer I was on my way towards the scene of one of the most shocking premeditated murders of the century. I shall be pardoned, however, by all who are acquainted with the park itself, so extensive, so fresh, so tranquil; and between the trunks of its great trees the mountains of Wicklow are so beautiful to see! On that remote July afternoon, as I remember, the colour of the sky, an ashen gray, softened still more this verdant landscape. The tame deer, in herds, browsed the thick, rain-fed grass. Some young men, in white flannel, were assiduously playing cricket among the old beech-trees. What a contrast to the visions called up by my driver, one of those strange Irishmen of the lower class, in whom you at once recognize the bad and the good in the Keltic blood, so enthusiastic and so cruel, so lovable and so formidable! His clothes, here and there torn, testified to his general recklessness. His complexion revealed the destructive habit of whiskey drinking. And yet his attentions to me, the offer of his own rug if it rained, his care in arranging the

cushion to wedge my inexperience upon the longitudinal bench where I had to sit sideways back to back with himself, his care of his horse whom he familiarly called "Harry,"—all revealed an essentially social nature and that ready sympathy which characterizes the race. I recognized him as friendly, intelligent, cordial, yet withal perfectly capable of having himself taken part in the murder which he related to me:

"Yes, your honour," he said, "Mr. Burke and Lord Frederick were taking their evening walk. The park is so charming for that. It is the finest in the kingdom, you know"; then, with a laugh, "I like to come here very much, myself, in weather like this, to repair my health and to repair my purse"; but no words could do justice to the wink with which he uttered this invitation to tip. Then, going on with his story: "Two cars stopped. A number of men attacked Mr. Burke. Nobody had any grudge against Lord Frederick. Why didn't he run away? They would have let him escape. He tried to defend his companion. So, of course, they killed him too. Mr. Burke's body was found with eleven knife wounds in it. And the men got away. Look, there is the place, where you see the two crosses dug out in the ground."

I had gotten out to examine more closely this savage memento of a savage crime, when I heard myself called by my name in French, and looking up I experienced

that absurd shock of surprise of which I spoke at the beginning of this story, to see, perched on a car just like my own, a young man whom I had often met in Paris, sometimes in society, sometimes at my club, a certain Comte de Corcieux. A young woman sat beside him. I knew that he had been married near the close of the preceding winter. What, then, could be more natural than that he should wish, after the fashion of young married people at the present time, who like to travel, to show his wife England; and that from there they should make a little expedition into Ireland? At the moment, I did not follow this line of reasoning, and "I remained stupefied," as they used to say in the old dramas, at this apparition, here in Phoenix Park, of a French idler, whose Ultima Thule should have been Nice and Monte Carlo on the south, Dieppe or Deauville on the north, and eastward, perhaps, Carlsbad, possibly Saint-Moritz. He, meanwhile, perceived my surprise and began laughing, with the merry laugh that he has from his mother, that Pauline de Corcieux of whom too much scandal is current. Maxime also inherits from her his blue eyes, his small separated teeth, his slight lisp, his brilliant colour and the pale blonde tint of his hair. These little signs of effeminacy correct his otherwise too marked resemblance to his father, one of those *gentilshommes* of exceptional and striking ugliness, who for all that show race. This son of a very ill-favoured man has a singular suggestion about him of the paternal disadvan-

tages, being himself, all the same, a very graceful and very elegant man. Maxime was at this time twenty-five years of age. One would have thought him the brother, and but slightly the elder brother, of his very young wife, also fair and pink, also with beautiful blue eyes and a child's laugh, whom I saw sitting close to him on the little seat; and these two pretty Parisian dolls, manifestly coated, shirted, hatted, booted, by the best makers of the rue de la Paix, really formed, on that car and in that place, the most unexpected and absurd group, at the side of their Irish driver, equally soaked in liquor, equally ragged in his yellowish suit, equally jovial, with mine, and quite as savage of aspect. They, the husband and wife, fully appreciated the paradox of their presence under the venerable ash-trees of this Dublinese Bois de Boulogne. For it was the first thing that Maxime said to me, with his habitual grace of welcome, again an inheritance from his mother; and this grace made me pardon him for being to such a degree "the Frenchman on his travels," always displeased with every country that is not France, laughing, frivolous, having no understanding of what he sees and looking at it only enough to turn it into ridicule. The enemies that we have made by this mocking habit of ours, whose triviality and harmlessness no foreigner will ever suspect!

"You are surprised to see me here," he began. "It surprises me, too. It is too ridiculous. But how glad I am to meet you. You are never in Paris. And yet

what sort of pleasure can you find in coming to places like this? Don't you think so, Germaine? May I present you to Mme. de Corcieux?" and, the ceremony performed, "these English railways where they lock you in like prisoners, what a horror! And their way of taking your luggage, without anything to identify it by, is that reasonable? And this Dublin, isn't it a hole? And these vehicles! Where did they invent such things? A country where it rains all day long and not a closed carriage to be had! And this accent, '*Good marning, sair,*'" he had already noticed the Irish accent; "and these things to eat, vegetables especially, without a pinch of salt or an ounce of butter. And filthy! Ah! she is neat, the green Erin! I hope you are going to serve them out in a book; don't you, Germaine?"

"It's the women's dress that looks to me like insanity," said Mme. de Corcieux. "Just notice that one going by now. I have a desire to get out and go and tell her to go home and put on proper clothes! With this sky and this smoke, how absurd to wear gowns and blouses of light-coloured linen, and bunches of flowers on their hats! And all these children, barefooted in the mud! We saw one going along the sidewalk with a pair of shoes in his hand, did we not, Max?"

"Did we not, Max?" "Don't you think so, Germaine?" This chatter as of two sparrows, by turns caressing and complaining, was all the more ludicrous, because every now and then there would be something

said whose naïve ignorance was a punishment of this impertinent cackle — like this question, which they both put to me the same instant.

“And can you explain to me,” said the husband, “why this man insisted on bringing us here to see the place where a certain Sir Furke — Rurke — Purke — what is his name? — was murdered?”

“Sir Burke,” corrected the wife, “and Lord Cavendish.” It was my opportunity, now or never, to give them a lesson which would teach them not to laugh too much at a social condition, whose most elementary usages they did not understand; and I rectified their expression, substituting in my reply the simple “Mr. Burke,” for the “Sir Burke,” — without Christian name! — and “Lord Frederick Cavendish,” for the “Lord” by itself! Neither of them, however, noticed this small epigram of my pedantry. As I related in detail that gloomy episode of the agrarian crisis, I perceived a genuine consternation invade their smiling faces. They looked at each other with an alarm that I could scarcely understand; and it became still more inexplicable to me when I heard them interchange these remarks:

“Then these fellows are socialists and anarchists besides?” said Maxime.

“But we were told what good Catholics they were, and even clericals,” exclaimed the young wife.

“Now I wish we had gotten through with our sale, don’t you, Germaine?” rejoined the husband.

"It makes cold chills run down my back to own property in such a country," she replied. And her delicate, nervous shoulders shivered under the cape of her travelling cloak. "Well," she continued, opening her umbrella whose silver handle was the head of a goose,— "How appropriate!" I thought, giving an instance myself of our great national fault of hasty and unjust judgment,— "the rain is beginning again. It is the third shower this afternoon. This time we'll go home, shall we not, Max?"

And, indeed, the shower was beginning, a heavy, pelt-ing rain. It beat upon the flowers of the hats and the light linen dresses of the Dublinese ladies, without causing them to turn back from their walk towards the end of the park. It soaked with water the torn garments of the drivers, who did not seem to mind it in the least. I was already too familiar with the abrupt changes of this climate not to bid my man drive on, and I abandoned my two "goslings" (that was the disrespectful appellation I had mentally given them), not without having received and accepted an invitation to dine at their hotel the same evening. This illogical conduct had a reason: the intense curiosity, awakened in me by their allusion, just before, to an estate in Ireland and a sale. "Land-owners in Ireland, these young Corcieux!" I repeated to myself. "One or other of them must have received an inheritance. But this is most unexpected."

And, indeed, it proved to be even stranger than I had

thought. The reader will judge of it on my simple relation of the story that Maxime told me at this dinner, offered so cordially, accepted from that eternal motive of psychical investigation—the literary man's instinctive professional duplicity. As I take the notebook in which I wrote down our conversation, I can see us now, all three seated at a small table in the best hotel in Dublin. We had before us, according to immutable English custom, wineglasses of various colours, blue, red, green, for the claret, port, and Rhine wines; and flowers, fresh and still wet from the rain and fog of that damp country, carnations, geraniums, and sweet peas, surrounded by ferns. A swarm of waiters in dress-coats,—what coats!—all Germans, went and came, distributing portions from a *menu* written in French,—what portions, what a *menu*, and what French!—to some fifty ladies and gentlemen, all in evening dress. And they all used one and the same black sauce for the broiled salmon, the roast lamb, the duck with sage dressing; and all of them were sunburnt by outdoor life to the degree that the women's low-necked gowns showed a line of tan traced as by a pencil. And they drank—some, whiskey and soda; some, *brut* champagne, loaded with alcohol; some, “cup” made with fragrant herbs, like an herb tea; some, ordinary lemonade or ginger beer. The little Comtesse de Corcieux, exquisite in mauve,—I learned later that it was the obligatory half-mourning of the heiress,—with her

bride's diamonds in her dainty ears, gazed upon this diversity of beverages with frightened eyes, whose horrified expression would have amused me more had I not been too much interested in Maxime's reply to my question:

"You were speaking this afternoon of a sale that you hoped to make in Ireland. Have you property here?"

"Not much," he replied; "an estate of about two hundred and fifty acres only, and I have had it only for a few months. But the history of this property is amusing. You could make a romance out of it without changing anything but the names. You knew, or perhaps you do not know, that our family are natives of Libourne. My great-great-grandfather,—that is going back quite a distance you see,—was President of the Parliament of Bordeaux. In '91 he emigrated, which was lucky, for six or seven of his colleagues were guillotined the following year. Do not lose the thread; you would never dream what happened. This President de Corcieux had extensive vineyards in the region of Bordeaux, and had many dealings with a Galway wine merchant who supplied the whole island with Bordeaux wines. He escaped on board of one of this man's vessels, and on his arrival in this miserable country the first thing he did, being then fifty years of age, was to fall in love with and marry a girl of twenty. Her name was Mary O'Brien. I had supposed until this very day that she belonged to the highest nobility of

the island. To-day I have seen the name over so many shop doors that I have my doubts. But let us go on. I forgot to add that at the time of this marriage the President was a widower. He had a son, my great-grandfather, who was serving in the army of the princes.

"By this second wife, married in Ireland, the *émigré* had another son, who himself had a son, so that here we have the beginning of an Irish branch of the Corcieux — a branch which is now extinct. But before I tell how it happens that I inherit from them, I must relate to you the story of the President's return to France, in 1814. In the depths of Galway, the worthy man receives news of the fall of Bonaparte and the Restoration. He sets sail and lands in Bordeaux, after an absence of twenty-three years. He goes at once to his house at Libourne. It has become the Sub-Prefecture. He is refused admittance. He gets angry and is threatened with imprisonment. He is in such a rage that he reëmbarks, a fortnight later, on the same vessel that brought him, sure that the world is coming to an end, and spends the remainder of his life on a little estate by the sea in Ireland. He bought it with the money obtained by the sale of a few diamonds that he had snatched up in leaving France, and he called the place Neptune Vale. Here he died, at the age of ninety, without ever being willing to return to France. He is what I call a reactionary."

"And without ever again seeing his elder son," interrupted Mme. de Corcieux, "who, for his part, never thought of such a thing as visiting his father in Ireland."

"But that is quite the *ancien régime*, madame," I said. "In the memoirs of the Prince de Ligne there is a sentence of like effect: 'My father detested me, I have never known why; we had never seen each other.'"

"To feel like that about your family is something shocking to me," she replied. "Max ought to have begun at once with the other story, which is so pretty."

"So pretty, so pretty!" said the young man. I had already noticed that he felt it his duty, from time to time, to assume sceptical airs in the presence of his little wife, as of a fellow who knew a thing or two, who had seen life. "As soon as it is a question of love, women are very indulgent. Would you be pleased some day, I should like to know, to have your son behave like the hero of this pretty story? Fancy this!" he said, turning to me. "I told you that Neptune Vale was bought by the President out of his small means. The property reverted to us upon the death of his grandson, the half-cousin of my grandfather, the general. My grandfather had three children by his wife, a Bonnivet,—my poor father, my Aunt Lautrec, whom you know, and my Uncle Jules, about whom I am going to tell you. I ought to have mentioned him first, for he was the oldest. My father had often described him to me as a very gen-

tle fellow, very calm, rather shy, but extremely determined, as obstinate as he was quiet, and having quite a remarkable talent for art. He sang, it seems, enchantingly, and he painted a little. As he was also extremely devout and, on the completion of his studies had not manifested a desire for any career, it was believed that he would take the vows. Instead of which, one fine day, — he was perhaps twenty-four years old, — he comes to ask authorization from his father to marry the governess of my Aunt Lautrec, a girl of no family, I think an orphan, who had been in the house a year, and had nothing to recommend her but her *beaux yeux* and manners more refined than is usual with such people.

“You may imagine how he is received by the general, and especially by *la générale*! In brief, he gets the strongest kind of a negative, and the adventuress is turned out of the house. She was twenty-three, and you may suppose this was not her first attempt. My Uncle Jules makes no ado about it, he quits the house publicly, he employs the *sommation respectueuse*, and he marries the governess. Naturally, his supplies were cut off, his allowance taken away. My father has often told me how he entreated him, and their mother, too. Nothing did any good. To earn a little money, the obstinate fellow began giving lessons in drawing — a Corcieux giving private lessons! Think of that! And in 1840, at the moment when my grandfather had just been made peer of France by Louis Philippe!

"In these circumstances it happened that the French Corcieux inherited this Irish property. It was not very easy to know what to do with it. The general caused it to be offered to my uncle, on condition that he would agree to leave France at once. My uncle accepted. I will do him the justice to say that he kept his promise. In fact, he kept it too well, for he never replied to any of the letters which were written to him, neither at his father's death nor his mother's, nor on the occasion of his brother's or his sister's marriage. It is probable that he had been too deeply wounded. It was natural enough, however, that the general should not have been very much gratified to have a governess for his daughter-in-law, nor my poor father and my aunt very happy to call by the name of sister a person who had been a servant in the family.

"What did my uncle do at Neptune Vale? How did he live? Was he happy or unhappy in this absurd marriage? We never knew anything about it except that his wife and he had no children, and that they died within a week of each other, last May, he at the age of sixty-nine, she at sixty-eight. We did not expect to inherit from them, as you may well suppose. Indeed, they had invested in annuities whatever ready money they possessed. This was but little. The general was not very rich, and, so far as he could, he had disinherited this rebellious son. There remained the land, and this fell to us. My uncle probably did not expect to die so

soon, and he had made no will. My Aunt Lautrec has relinquished to me her share of the property. This is the whole story, which makes Germaine so ecstatic. She conjectures in it a great character, great love, and great happiness. What I see is great folly on my uncle's part, and for us a great deal of trouble in getting rid of this Neptune Vale in a country where, it appears, the peasants have an agreeable habit of peppering or stabbing the landowners."

"Do not believe him," interrupted the little wife; "he talks as if he were the most prosaic and matter-of-fact man in the world; but the truth is he thinks, just as I do, that the family were very hard towards these poor lovers. And, besides, we should be very ungrateful not to defend them. He speaks of trouble. Well, fancy this—a month ago in Paris, we were obliged to lecture each other to keep from doing two foolish things. Max was perfectly wild to give me a half-row of pearls, just the size of my own, that he had seen in the rue de la Paix. And I was wild to have him give himself a pair of Russian horses that Casal has to sell. And we were going to give it up, both of us, and be reasonable, when suddenly arrives, from a Mr. Crawford who lives near Neptune Vale, an offer to give us three thousand pounds, seventy-five thousand francs, money down, for this estate about which we were asking ourselves what we could do with it! Seventy-five thousand francs gives us the horses, and the pearls, and besides that our money for play at

Monte Carlo all this next winter, which we are to spend at Cannes. I said to Max, 'You have no occasion to hesitate; and since it is best to attend to these things in person, let us go to Ireland. And we can do some shopping in London on the way.' So, here we are. To-morrow, at four o'clock, we shall be at Neptune Vale. We shall take time enough to conclude this affair, to see if there are any family papers that we ought to keep, and then we shall come back. I don't propose to grow old in this country. I think not. No, no!"

De Corcieux had noticed the interest with which I followed this curious story of his grandfather and uncle. "Suppose you go with us to Neptune Vale," he said. "We leave at nine, and go as far as a station that has a name something like Oranmore. There, my uncle's old coachman will meet us with a carriage. Thence, it is not more than a dozen miles. I don't know how many kilometres that is, it can't be over fifteen or twenty. It appears there is a large house, and the butler, one John Corrigan, seems to be an intelligent fellow, to judge by his letters. Is it agreed?"

"You must let me reflect," I said, laughing. "You are rather too rapid. I shall have to see whether I can go out of my way so far. You say it is on the Bay of Galway? On which side, the near or the far?"

"That is just like us!" cried the young wife, gayly. "Neither he nor I have thought of looking at the map."

"There was no need," said Maxime, "for Corrigan

sent us word at what hour the train leaves here, and the name of the station. Besides, there are Railway Guides; and I never could find anything on a map!"

II

But I examined very carefully this map which my two compatriots had scoffed at with a disdain which probably made me smile. Alas! I have long since ceased to smile on meeting in us all, from small to great, this national infirmity of inaccuracy, the sure mark of decay. I ascertained that the *détour* would not prevent me from going, afterwards, by the way of Limerick, to Killarney and Kerry, where I intended to stay for a time; and, on the following morning, I took the Galway express with M. and Mme. de Corcieux, arriving at Oranmore at about two o'clock, after a journey entirely devoid of incident. The centre of Ireland, which is traversed by this railway, is an immense plain studded with turf-pits, with a few ruined castles here and there, and no other element of picturesqueness than the luxuriance of its verdure.

The conversation of my two companions was not of a nature to correct the monotony of the landscape. And still I did not reach the limit of this short journey without having at least done them justice in one respect. This young couple, doubtless, had some of the faults habitual to their class and in their environment:

they were light, superficial; their slightest remarks revealed an existence absurdly occupied with the most commonplace pleasures of a social life, where good women amuse themselves like *cocottes*, and men like grooms. This being admitted, Maxime and Germaine had a merit which to me is always irresistible: they were unaffected, and they were kind. They had much simplicity and youthfulness, and, above all, they loved each other. Both had been, evidently, very ill brought up in a very spoiled world. A certain native uprightness had saved them from having the bloom rubbed off their hearts. I was sure, for example, that Maxime had never suspected his mother's shocking reputation; and as for Germaine, one only needed to see her blue eyes when they were fixed upon Max to understand that she had truly married like an honest girl, giving her whole heart, and giving it for ever. In this deep and sincere affection which united them, these two amiable goslings, as I had designated them in my misanthropy the night before, were still extremely French, of that land where married life, when it is good, is excellent: and this young couple so evidently belonged in this respect to the best class that, after leaving Dublin with a frightful dread of their society, this very society would have prevented me from regretting the journey, even if Neptune Vale had proved entirely disappointing. But it was written that, for once, my expectation of new impressions was to be gratified, and even surpassed.

The expected vehicle awaited us at Oranmore. It was a car escorted by a wagonette for the luggage. The two drivers were both in deep mourning. They both had, also, in the expression of their faces a something so savage, so rebellious, that it struck even Maxime. He said to me in French, as we took our seats back to back, the driver and I on one side, Maxime and his wife on the other :

"This is a pleasant beginning. Did you notice the look of these two fellows? How many 'Leagues' do you suppose they belong to?"

"As to this man," I rejoined, after scrutinizing my neighbour, "none, I would wager. This is a man who does his work too well to be a revolutionist. See how he drives, so quietly and so skilfully, too; and how neat he is, his clothes, his hat, his linen, his hands."

"But why did they look at us so savagely?" insisted Maxime.

"Perhaps it is only that they are servants who were very fond of their old masters," suggested Mme. de Corcieux, "and are not pleased to see new ones come. We shall hear how Marie and Julien get on with the other man; but ours, I must confess, has the look of an honest savage."

I forgot to mention that the two lovers had seen fit to bring along with them in their journey across this wild country, a very correct valet and lady's maid, — in dress and manner two parodies of their employers, — whose mien had been faultless as they surveyed the wagon

upon which they were destined to travel, in order to keep watch over the six boxes. Six boxes for a week's stay in the heart of County Galway! It was not probable that the affected Marie and the elegant Julien were, at that moment, looking at the driver with any more satisfaction than their master looked at ours, to whom he suddenly addressed a question, speaking with singular abruptness:

"What is your name, driver?"

"Paddy Corrigan, your honour," replied the man.

"You are related to the butler, then?" And seeing that the Irishman looked at him without seeming to understand, he repeated, "Yes, the butler, John Corrigan, who wrote to me."

"John Corrigan?" the young Irishman repeated; "he is my father."

"Why did he seem not to understand of whom I was speaking?" Maxime said in French to his wife. "You will see that these 'excellent servants' are all socialists humiliated at being called servants. It will be like New York, I suppose, where there is only 'help.'" Then turning again to the man, he inquired, "How long had you been in my uncle's service?"

"Always, your honour," Paddy replied. "I was born in his house."

"And your father?" Germaine inquired, with a mischievous glance at her husband, as if to say, "You see I was right!"

"My father also was born at Neptune Vale, sixty-four years ago, in the time of the old count, before Count Jules, my lady; and this old fellow was born there too," he added, caressing his horse with the whip lash, "eighteen years ago, Billy, wasn't it?" Billy pricked up his ears, understanding that he was spoken of, and quickened his trot, as if to assert that, in spite of his age, an animal born at Neptune Vale feared neither a hill nor the weight of four passengers; and Paddy proudly remarked this effort of the good beast, saying: "You would not take him to be eighteen, any more than you would my father to be sixty-four. *The good people* have always protected us," he added, with emphasis on the words, "the good people."

"I begin to believe you are right," said Maxime to his wife, at once gayly and piteously, "and that my uncle added this eccentricity to all his others—that he knew what we shall never know, the old servants of the romances. There are some like that in Scott's novels, I think. *The good people!* There is no other place in the world where you will hear a coachman speak of his master with such veneration!"

"It remains to be learned whether it is his masters of whom Paddy is speaking," I said. "I read, the other day, that the Irish peasant always calls the fairies 'the good people' to render them favourable by this flattery. However, we can easily ascertain. Tell me, Mr. Corrigan," I said, addressing the young driver, "you spoke

of 'the good people'; are there many in your country who believe in fairies?"

"All who have met them, your honour," replied the young man, with that singular glance, alike in all latitudes, of the peasant who at once dreads and despises the sarcasm of the man whom he knows to be more learned than himself. There was such an expression of certainty in his tone that I forbore to question him further. I had no doubt that, of himself, he would almost immediately relate to us some story having for its hero one of the innumerable spirits of the Irish folk-lore. I chanced, as a result of this very recent reading, to know the names of some of these popular demons: the Lepricaun, who walks the highway with only one foot shod; the Cluricaun, who plunders cellars; the Gonconer, who pays court to the shepherd girls; the Dullahan, or headless phantom, and others still. I began naming them over to my companions, telling them what I knew of the exploits of these malevolent or kindly spirits. And, in truth, the landscape about us at the time was fitted to explain, to justify these fantastic dreams by its character of savage strangeness and melancholy poetry. The road now ran, solitary, through a plain almost entirely treeless, and encumbered, sown, crushed, by so vast a quantity of enormous stones that they gave a gray colouring to the whole region. To recover a little arable soil from this calcareous desert, the peasants had made innumerable walls, if one can give this name to long lines of rocks,

laid one upon another without cement, so that the sky could perpetually be seen through the interstices, a cloudy, low sky, gray as the rocks; and the Bay of Galway spread out in the distance its water of the same hue, over which glided brown-sailed vessels. This sad nature, all in dead, neutral tints, had to animate it, only animals feeding on the scanty grass within the enclosures formed by these rude walls. No shepherd guarded them; a shackle of rope or braided straw secured one of their hind feet to one of their fore feet. As we passed we could see, here, sheep, further on, goats, there, a horse, hobbled in this way, run from one end of a pasturage to another, with an almost painful limp. Flocks of white gulls passed over, uttering that call of the seabird that has such a gloomy resemblance to a child's plaintive cry. Crows of the large kind, those which have the tragic sobriquet of "battlefield crows," hopped about over the meagre fields, and the desolation was still further increased by the quantity of ruined hovels that rose along the way. There were the four walls, and where the hearth had blazed, there was a little black soot, the last remains of the fire around which, in nights of autumn and winter, the peasants, now departed, had talked about "the good people," whom they also called "the gentry" and "the army."

It was as if a spell had been laid upon this stony Ireland, so different from the green Ireland we had lately traversed. It was easy to understand how, in the dusk of the evening, the fog coming in from that tumultuous

sea, trailing over these poor weeds, torn against these sterile rocks, clinging in shreds to these bare ruins, should take to the gaze of a ragged passer-by, with eyes like those of an animal, — such as we were meeting at intervals, — aspects of living figures, the appearance of beings from another world. The relation between this scene and these legends was so evident that my two companions felt it themselves, especially the young wife, who very soon, with question upon question, had exhausted my feeble erudition; but as I had mentioned to her, among many other spirits, the Banshee, a kind of White Lady who appears in certain houses when a death is about to occur, she addressed herself at once to Paddy Corrigan directly, and asked him:

“Was it imagined that the Banshee appeared when our uncle died?”

“It was not imagined, my lady,” replied the man, and after a moment’s silence, he added: “some one heard her, just as I hear you.”

“Some one of the household?” asked Mme. de Corcieux.

“Yes, my lady,” replied Paddy, “my Aunt Harriet, twice. The first time was the night when the countess died. The countess was not ill, she had been out with me during the day in this car. About ten o’clock, soon after we had gone to bed, a cry awakened my aunt. She said to herself, ‘It is a bat.’ She opened the window. No bat, any more than here. She returned

to bed. 'The bird has flown away,' she thought, and just then there was another cry. Then she said to herself, 'It is the Banshee.' That same night the countess awakened and waked the count. 'I don't know what is the matter with me,' she said. She took his hand and placed it over her heart with a loud scream. She was dead. The count at once fell ill. For over forty years they had never been separated. We saw at once that he would not last long, but we did not expect that it would be so soon. Seven days after the funeral, this time at eleven o'clock, my wife and I were asleep, and our old aunt came and waked us. 'I have heard her again,' she said to me, 'we must say our prayers.' The next day the count died."

"You ought not to talk to Germaine about ghosts and spirits," said Maxime de Corcieux, calling my attention to the serious face with which his wife had listened to this account, related, I admit, with that tone of conviction which forbids a simile. "And I myself ought not to have allowed her to question this fool of a coachman. She believes in dreams, you know, in second sight, and in people's appearing before those they love at moments of danger. And now she is going to be afraid of this Banshee of Neptune Vale."

"I am not afraid of anything," replied the young wife, colouring slightly, "but you yourself have acknowledged to me that you have had presentiments, have you not? This old peasant woman had a presenti-

ment, that is all. What touches me is the story of this death of our aunt and uncle whom we never dreamed of; this husband and wife who departed almost together, after having never been separated; this man who had given up everything for this woman, and could not survive her longer than a week; this love which ended only with death. It is true I do feel it all very deeply. You see," she added with a smile, "I was right in maintaining that this marriage of your uncle's is a beautiful romance; and both his wife and himself must have possessed exquisite natures; first, to have so loved each other; and, then, to have made themselves so much regretted by all around them. This good fellow had tears in his eyes as he told us the story."

"Don't go so fast," interrupted Maxime, with his little air of superiority as of a man who knows life. "I do not say that he does not regret his employers; but he is particularly anxious that we should know that he regrets them, to induce us to keep him on. For the matter of that, he's quite right, and I am ready to recommend him to the new proprietor if there is occasion. Tell me," he continued, speaking in English to the man, "do you know Mr. Crawford?"

"Yes, your honour, I know him," was the reply.

"Did you know that I am going to sell him the place?"

"Yes, your honour, I have heard so."

"You've made an agreement with him, then, and are going to remain as his coachman?"

"Never, your honour," replied Paddy, with singular energy; and he repeated the word, "never!"

"Why not?" asked Maxime, a little confused. The vivacity of the reply contradicted rather too comically his claim of conjugal superiority in the knowledge of the human heart.

"Because I don't like him, your honour," replied the young man. "No," he continued, "I will never see that man become the master of Neptune Vale."

"And what will you do, then?" Mme. de Corcieux in turn inquired.

"We have decided to go to Stamford, Connecticut, my lady, with all the family."

"To Stamford?" said the young wife. "Is it far from here?"

"It is in the United States of America," rejoined the Irishman, fixing his eyes upon the horizon of the sea near which lay our road at the moment. His bright eyes seemed to seek, across the space, that far-off continent, the asylum of so many of his fellow-countrymen, whence came straight the big waves whose foam broke within a few yards of us.

"And why did you choose Stamford?" asked Germaine de Corcieux.

"Because all the Galway men go there when they emigrate," replied the young Irishman.

"But are you sure you can get your living there?" inquired Maxime.

"God's help is nearer than the door," the young coachman replied sententiously. "I can take care of horses, can't I, Billy? My father can keep books. He has kept all the accounts in Neptune Vale. My mother knows how to cook. My wife is a laundress, she did all the laundry work of the house. Teddy French, my brother-in-law, whom you saw at the station, is a good carpenter and cabinet maker and locksmith. He kept everything in order about the house. One of my two sisters was seamstress, and the other lady's maid to the countess. She can make a dress or a bonnet. All of us can do something, except our old aunt, and she has not far to go. To see Neptune Vale as it now is, is the end of the world to her."

"What did you say?" asked Mme. de Corcieux. "Did I understand you that there are eight of you at Neptune Vale—yourself, your father, your mother, your wife, your two sisters, your brother-in-law, and your aunt,—eight in all?"

"And six children, my lady," he replied; "three of mine and three of Teddy French's, that makes fourteen. But," he added, with a simplicity that showed how little he understood Mme. de Corcieux's surprise, "the house is large, and there are two hundred acres of land. Each one of us has enough to do. You will see directly, for we are very near. There, those slated roofs behind the trees!"

More than once have I, like all vagabonds whom an incurable restlessness of soul drives incessantly from one lodging for an hour to another lodging for an hour, regarded some spot in this great world with a nostalgic and almost poignant regret that I could not there fix my destiny. But this impression of the oasis, of the asylum, — to which one might bring her whom one loved, there to live for her, with her, solely and for ever, — never in my recollection have I felt it more strongly and more suddenly than at this bend in the road, at sight of the distant outline of gray roofs indicated by the whip of Paddy Corrigan.

The stony, desolate plain over which we had been driving for more than an hour ended abruptly, and from it extended a peninsula, attached to the mainland by a narrow causeway which, no doubt, at high tides, must have been swept by the waves, for it was protected by enormous blocks of stone. This peninsula, lying parallel with the coast, was separated from it by a narrow strait, a lagoon rather, which this same tide filled and left bare, alternately, as it came in and went out. I became aware afterwards what a fascinating life this going and returning of the water gave to the landscape, which became sombre and bright by turns, according as this narrow channel showed through the trees its dark masses of rocks covered with brown seaweed, or else the moving, throbbing mirror of those waves reflecting the sky.

At the moment of our arrival it was nearly high tide, and beyond it lay, revealed as if by magic, at the extremity of this sterile region, the most verdant and well wooded of parks. A slight rise in the ground on the west explained how this luxuriant vegetation had been protected against the terrible winds from the Atlantic. As we drew near the causeway, following along the lagoon, the sunlight, which had at last broken through the clouds, caressed the beautiful fine leafage of the ash-trees, the almost purple branches of the great black beeches, the strong foliage of the oaks, and here and there the lighter mass of the linden-tree or a sycamore. Various animals roved freely under the trees, enormous black-headed and black-footed sheep, cows, white and red, and, in enclosures, shaggy goats scrambling up the hedges. It was really an idyllic scene, an idyl between two deserts, as had been the happiness of the two who had loved each other so, between exile and death, in the house scarcely visible through the beautiful trees.

Beyond this narrow peninsula, there was visible again the sea, and then the mountains of Clare, sterile and nude, covered with the same deluge of gray stones through which we had passed since leaving Oranmore. Thus seen, in the soft transparent light of this beautiful northern July, after what we knew of the life lived there for forty years by Comte Jules and his wife, this park and this dwelling seemed

an apparition almost as much a matter of the imagination as the Banshee's call heard by the old visionary, Harriet. We felt it, all three of us, and we maintained that silence which certain things in life, truly inexpressible, impose upon the most careless. It was only after we had crossed the causeway, and were under the trees of the park, that Germaine de Corcieux translated aloud what we were thinking of—after her fashion, in which there was still a trace of the Parisian, factitious even in her most childlike sincerity, incapable of seeing nature without thinking of the opera.

“Don't you feel, both of you,” she said, “that this is not real, that it is a stage scene which will presently disappear? Look, the house there, with those statues and grottos, is like a corner of Versailles!”

And, at the moment, the car was entering a linden avenue, a *couvert*, as it used to be called, clipped in the old French way, showing the taste of the *émigré*, as did also the artificial grottos whose rocks were skilfully adorned with shell work. Carefully clipped box outlined a garden laid out in the same style, where were conspicuous those fine great fuchsias, taller than a man's height, which are rarely seen except in Valencia, and magnificent clumps of roses and carnations. In the centre, in a basin where the rain supplied, as best it could, the place of the missing aqueduct water, a Neptune, rudely carved in some

friable stone, performed the duty of accounting for the name of this place which was so strangely composite, —a facing of ivy and some bay-windows giving the house an English look, while the long wings, the brick balustrades of two small terraces and a row of urns along the top of the low building recalled the French eighteenth century. This house, which had held within it so much happiness, looked at once so fresh and so *rococo*, so venerable and so elegant, it seemed so well suited to shelter either the renunciations of an old age which had reached the end of all, or, just as appropriately, the gay happiness of youthful love, that the new owner could not suppress a sigh in the presence of these walls which he was about to sell.

"*Ma foi!*" he said, "if Uncle Jules had been wise enough to leave me this toy at two hours' distance from Paris, in Seine-et-Marne, for instance, or even in Maine, how very much pleased I should be to keep it!"

III

The besetment, the invasion, the conquest, of two hearts by a house, by that which floats invisible, intangible, imponderable, in rooms where refined and sensitive natures have lived long, have loved, have suffered, have died—this is the history of the few days that Maxime de Corcieux and his wife spent

with me in this Neptune Vale, whither I had allowed myself to be allured carelessly, almost reluctantly, and to which I have since returned so often in thought! Yes, so often have I again seen, as if it were of yesterday, our arrival, the stopping of the car before the door where the entire tribe of Corrigans and Frenches awaited us: men, women, girls, children, all in mourning, and all having that same look, at once inquisitive and hostile, interested and displeased, which had so much struck us in the case of the two young men who had met us at the station in Oranmore. Now, however, my companions and myself understood too well its meaning. While the head of the family, this steward farmer, so incorrectly called "the butler" by Maxime, saluted us with a "Welcome to Neptune Vale!" the faces of the others said clearly: "Here they are, then, these heirs who are about to sell the place that its dead owners made so dear to us. Why should they sell it?"

So often also have I lived over again that first moment of our entrance into the house! Even to this day I am touched by the recollection of the almost religious emotion which we felt as we stood in the vestibule, where, amid the old furniture, there were umbrellas and sticks, garden hats and shawls—as if Comte Jules and his wife were there, in the next room, about to go out and walk under the trees of this park which we had just traversed. Alas! they would never again use these poor

objects which had been the protection of their last rambles. Never again would they sit in this drawing-room, whose faded hangings were now rendered brighter by the last rays of a setting sun. On the table lay a book with half-cut leaves, the yellowed ivory of the paper-knife still between its pages. Before an easy chair a tapestry frame waited, the needle stuck into the last stitch, its silk not used up. The devotion of the servants had respected these relics to the point of leaving them untouched. They had merely renewed the flowers in the vases. A faint odour of mignonette filled the room, tender and caressing as the memory of something long past, and through the windows the sea was blue between the trunks of the ash-trees. If Comte Jules and his wife could have returned, they would only have had to sit down in their old places — she in her armchair, he in his *liseuse* — and the tall clock in its case of inlaid mahogany would have measured out their hours with its same monotonous ticking. To add to this semi-hallucination which made the former possessors of Neptune Vale so near, so present, in each room there was a portrait of one or the other, sometimes there were two or three portraits, the work of Comte Jules, of whom Maxime had said that “he painted a little.” Evidently he had made it a religious duty to paint these fifteen or twenty pictures of his wife, every one with its date, — from the first, belonging in the year of their marriage in 1844, — under which he had written, with the pride of a

love in arms against unjust humiliation, the plebeian name of her whom his father had proscribed :

FRANÇOISE COCHERIS

VICOMTESSE DE CORCIEUX

I can see us still, as we went from room to room, exploring the house, and calling each other to look at the portraits in order of date. It was as if we were following, year by year, the story of the dead woman's beauty, and of her happiness. She appeared, in this first picture, the year she came to Neptune Vale, so delicate, blonde, fresh ; so like, in her sweet splendour, as the young wife still scarcely more than the young girl, to this unknown niece, this inquisitive Parisian, who was now looking at her, herself also in the dawn of life and marriage and happiness ; and then, however long this life was to be, however radiant with felicity this marriage, an hour would come when the young Comtesse Germaine would be like the Comtesse Françoise of the latest portrait—wrinkled and pallid under her white hair ! The young wife, thoughtless by nature, but rendered thoughtful by her extreme affection for her husband, felt this almost unconsciously, and the feeling gave her a morbid interest in these pictures ; she was attracted towards them also by a desire to know what could have been the sovereign and irresistible charm whereby this dead woman had been able to make herself so greatly loved. Although the work, in these pictures, betrayed the awk-

wardness of the half-amateur badly served by his tool, their sincerity was absolute, and a very peculiar face revealed itself from their *ensemble*. One divined in the Comtesse Françoise a creature essentially, absolutely feminine, one of those gentle souls, all tenderness and fidelity, whose self-devotion is grace itself. She had never been extremely beautiful, but her eyes seemed to have been divine with their loving expression. They were large, dark blue, almost violet eyes, velvety, innocent, coaxing, lighted by the warmest and the most modest affection. And the man upon whom this affection had been lavished up to the very last moment, for she died, her heart resting against his hand, — him we could also follow, from canvas to canvas: here, a young man; there, in mature life; then, in his old age. This eminent lover had not possessed very much personal beauty, any more than his wife. But in his haughty ugliness the race was all the more recognizable because, in comparing the portrait of Comte Jules at twenty-five with the face of his nephew Maxime, I could discern the same type, with a beauty amounting to effeminacy in the latter, magnificent with atavism in the former. Yes, this strange Comte Jules, with a profile slightly equine, his high arched nose, his obstinate chin, his eyes near together, expressed in his whole aspect his heredity from a rough ancestry, all men of war and of faith. In the thirteenth century, a man of this strong physiognomy would have been a crusader. In the sixteenth, he would

have joined the Protestants under Montluc or the Catholics under Condé. In '93, he would have followed Charette and La Rochejaquelein. This passionate fervour of a heart which gives itself utterly, once and for ever, he had devoted to this woman, for whose worshipped sake he had accepted exile and alienation from all his own people; and, in this banishment of the lover, the feudal lord had found means to exercise the two ruling passions of the true *seigneur*,—to command and to protect. This pleasure house, built by his ancestor on this remote Atlantic coast, he had made his donjon, and the Corrigans and Frenches were his vassals. In the midst of the nineteenth century he had been able to live *as nobly*, in the old aristocratic meaning of the word, as any of the ancestors whose pride stirred within him. The sensation of this vigorous personality gave to this Neptune Vale a profound, vital unity. It had been—this house and this domain—something more than merely the shelter of a romantic happiness. All the place was the creation of the head of a clan, who had made other destinies take root around him, who had dominated and ameliorated them. The difference in appearance between his people and other Irish peasants, as we met them along the roads, proved this clearly, and so did the difference in feeling. A few words exchanged with John Corrigan and his son, with Teddy French and his wife, with any member of either family, sufficed to show in their humble thoughts a total absence of that

furious hatred, which at the time raged throughout the whole island; and, instead, there was a willingness to labour, an acceptance of the situation, a worship of the dead masters—those modest and noble virtues of the poor, which only spring up when they are sown from above, like the seed which the husbandman casts into the ground, his hand lifted to heaven, in that gesture superbly defined by the poet:

*“Sembler agrandir jusqu’aux étoiles
Le geste auguste du Semeur.”*

What a pity that all this work of the late master of Neptune Vale must disappear with him! And looking at these portraits, I felt with even greater intensity the sadness of this destruction. I was concerned in it, however, in no way but by a chance encounter in travelling; and, to tell the truth, I had somewhat the feeling, in wandering through this house, among the revelations upon which I came at every step as to the past of the dead owners, that I was profaning sacred and secret things. But, stranger to Comte Jules though I was, his resolute, pensive face seemed to reproach me when I reflected that his Neptune Vale was about to disappear. The Corriganes and the Frenches would go to America, far away. The rooms would be left vacant of their furniture. Other flowers would bloom in the garden laid out in another way. The venerable trees would be cut down or mutilated.

Notwithstanding my increasing regard for M. de Corcieux, and especially for his young wife, and in spite of my knowledge of Parisian life which made me admit the good sense of their intention to sell, I said to myself continually that the pair of horses from Casal, and the pearls from the jeweller in the rue de la Paix, and the evenings at the gaming tables at Monte Carlo would be dearly bought by this destruction, this murder, of a thing so rare. And I could not help thinking that, before the likeness of the uncle whose title he bore, and who had not felt at liberty to deprive him of the domain left by their common ancestor, Maxime, also, suffered from a vague, irresistible remorse, for I can still hear him saying to me as we went over this series of portraits:

"These are very poor paintings. Uncle Jules would never have made his fortune as a teacher of drawing. No matter. I shall except them from the sale. It is absurd. We know that portraits have no feeling, and still we treat them as if they were the people themselves. For nothing in the world would I be willing, for instance, that these should see Neptune Vale inhabited by this Crawford, since it appears, from the priest's talk, that he has made his fortune by lending money at too high rates of interest. But where does interest begin to be at too high rates, and what difference is there between this kind of speculation and the Bourse?"

On the day after our arrival, the parish priest, Father O'Shaughnessy, a worthy man, with the manners of a half-frightened peasant, notwithstanding his sixty years and more, had paid us a visit of ceremony, and he had revealed to us, with the discreet ecclesiastical reserves common to all clergy, even the most simple-minded, this somewhat unscrupulous origin of the purchaser's wealth. Then, the same day, this purchaser himself had made his appearance. Among the many vague impressions of these singular days the episodes relating to this man are the only ones which stand out in distinct scenes, and serve me to distribute this period of time, so short and crowded, into precise portions. We had come from Dublin to Neptune Vale on a Thursday. On Friday, then, as we were finishing luncheon at about half-past one, a car had stopped before the door, which Johnny Corrigan, who was receiving Maxime's directions, had recognized through the window. We saw his broad, elderly features grow troubled, his face turn pale under the red of the sunburn which his white hair made even more conspicuous; his brown eyes expressed an invincible repulsion, and his voice, usually so rough and guttural, trembled as he said:

"Will you permit me to withdraw? I have orders to give for dinner. Besides, your honour has a visitor."

"I should have known it was this Crawford," Maxime had said, when the steward had left the room,

and one of the women had come to announce the visitor. "Did you see Johnny's face change, and did you notice his daughter when she spoke the fatal name? It isn't because they are in his debt. Let us go into the drawing-room to receive this gentleman."

"Will you permit me also to make my escape," said Mme. de Corcieux, "if I find he is too objectionable? I understand that, according to Father O'Shaughnessy, he has done nothing that was illegal. But there is too much of the extortioner in this business of his."

It would have been necessary, under the circumstances, for Crawford to be a man of exceptionally noble aspect to prevent Germaine de Corcieux from feeling towards him that violent antipathy which she apprehended. Even without these not very favourable details in respect to him that had been given us, he would have been obliged to stand the test of those imaginative comparisons in which women manifest sincere and cruel prejudices. But there was no need of prejudice, to be shocked that the fine, chivalrous Comte Jules should have as a successor in his home the detestable usurer who awaited us in the drawing-room. He was a man of about fifty-five, not very tall, strongly built, with the figure of a prize-fighter, the feet and hands enormous, and a face so broad and long that it might well have surmounted a giant's shoulders. The animalism of this brutal face was rendered more manifest by the cut of the beard, which framed the face, the chin

being left bare. The jaw was clearly outlined, vigorous and rapacious. The nose, somewhat too small and rather sharp, added, to this expression of beast of prey, a character of eager craftiness in no way belied by the light blue eyes, of a blue cold and hard as steel. This individual, whom everything revealed as the successful plunderer, wore clothes made of that strong, coarse woolen stuff that is woven still in Ireland and Scotland, in nearly all the peasants' houses, of a colour not to be injured by rain, reddish and muddy, like the colour of his beard and of the hair which grew low on his forehead. While waiting for us, he had evidently been looking over the furniture of the room, attentively, like an appraiser, and — why does that gesture come before me so clearly at this moment? — I see him now, stroking his nose, that little nose of his, sharp as a beak, in that broad face, with his square hands hairy about the joints. His way of looking at us as we entered was so scrutinizing and so defiant that I remember that also, and his falsetto voice, which completed the disagreeableness of the whole impression. On this latter point, we were unjust towards him. Was it his fault that, in traversing under the perpetual rain these roads of County Galway, he had contracted a series of sore throats and an incurable hoarseness? But the blurred, smothered sound of this utterance from this colossal chest, even in commonplace words of courtesy, was too painful for my nerves, at least; and it was a great relief to me when

Mme. de Corcieux, after a few minutes, said to her husband:

"You have business to talk over with Mr. Crawford. We will leave you. You will find us in the park."

And when we were both outside, she said :

"Well! it is really worse than I expected. Were you ever present at the marriage of a charming young girl to some really frightful man? I feel like that now; and, really, as strongly as that. Oh! I should beg Max not to sell this place," she added, after a minute, "if I did not know how very much he wants that pair of horses! And then, besides, there is no sense in having a house in Ireland. And when such an opportunity offers, just at the moment! All the same, poor Aunt Françoise and poor Uncle Jules, if they saw this man bargaining for their dear place!"

"Would you believe," Maxime said to me, an hour later, as we were walking together, the visitor having at last taken leave, "would you believe that I had real satisfaction for a minute in learning that this Crawford is not buying Neptune Vale for the purpose of living here himself, he is such a low, odious fellow! He acts in behalf of a company which proposes to demolish the house and build here a great hotel, with grounds for cricket and tennis, and golf links, and bathing houses, and fishing-boats,—the whole outfit of what is called a 'summer resort.' This company

already has hotels of this kind in Wicklow and Kerry. This one will be for the west."

"And have you made the sale?" I asked.

"Not yet," he said; "but it amounts to that. Crawford will come again on Tuesday to complete the affair, and, after that, I shall get off within twelve hours. It is all I can do now to bear the way Johnny looks, and the women, especially. Fancy, I have not been able to see them all! You remember the Aunt Harriet that Paddy spoke about, the person who had seen or heard their Banshee? I inquired for her. I found that she was not willing to be presented to us, and that nobody was willing she should be, such is her grief! Is it my fault, however? In my position, can I retain a property worth a hundred thousand francs, that would bring me in one per cent, in those years when it was not an actual expense to me? I find that Crawford is willing to pay as much as eighty-five or ninety. All the same," he added after silence, which reminded me of his wife's not long before, "if I had not seen how much Germaine wanted those pearls! At least, it is not this rascal's money which is going to purchase Neptune Vale. There is that! That is a comfort."

IV

The pair of horses, the half-row of pearls—it was their life, their gay, frivolous life of a fashionable,

devoted couple, which returned to haunt them, to attract them, to assume its hold upon them; and as I listened, first to one, then to the other, I saw them distinctly, far away from this sad, solitary Neptune Vale,—Maxime, returning from the Bois to his club in the Rue Royale, at the close of a lovely afternoon in May, seated in his high phaeton, driving two superb horses; and I saw his young wife, on an evening, also in May, sit down at the flower-decked table of a handsome dinner party, her graceful shoulders bare, and around her dainty neck the pure perfection of her pearls, shining with their delicate splendour! Yes, this was their life: for her, to adorn herself more and more, like a bird of paradise pluming itself in the sunshine; for him, to drive horses, and deal at faro at his club, as beseems a young man of great name and great fortune, in this sad Paris of our time! That they should both have felt, even superficially, the romance and poetry of this remote Irish spot, was in itself a marvel: in her case, the miracle of love, which gives to the most insignificant of women a something of genius; in his, the miracle of race, which has the result that, with a certain quality of blood, a man is never entirely commonplace in soul. But that this impression could go farther, that the magic of this Neptune Vale and its phantoms could get the better of prancing horses and rare pearls, not to speak of the temptations of

the Riviera, I confess I did not expect, and still less the form which this resolution would take.

The other episode, the decisive one, also comes back to me very distinctly. It was the afternoon of Monday, that is to say, the day previous to the one fixed for Crawford's return to conclude the affair. Maxime was employed with Paddy in verifying the inventory of the harness-room. Mme. de Corcieux and I were walking in the orchard, on account of the high wind which had come up. This orchard, with walls of twice a man's height, was, in this sheltered domain, a shelter still more close. Outside, we saw the great branches of the tall trees shaken by the gale; we heard it howl above us and around us; and, within, scarcely a breath moved the shrubs set along the edge of the alleys. Pears and apples slowly rounded themselves out under the foliage. The flower beds had hedges of gooseberry and currant bushes. Protected by the wall, plum-trees and cherry-trees were spread out on espaliers. Golden bees and yellow wasps and big, hairy bumble-bees were busy over the last cherries, now overripe, and the first plums, already purple and cleft open. Flowers of every kind grew in this enclosure, especially pansies and pinks, for which the former owners seemed to have a singular predilection, for the varieties represented there were innumerable. In the four corners, arbours of verdure awaited the loiterer's siesta, each with its seats, with different exposure, so that one could get the sunshine,

according to the hour of the day—the pale sunshine of this northern sky. All the paths were covered with very fine bluish pebbles, that creaked a little under the foot-step. This faint creak, the calling of the robins in the branches, the humming of the bees, the sound of the wind outside and of the sea, the croaking of a raven on one of the beeches in the park—these were the only sounds that accompanied the conversation to which we abandoned ourselves. We still talked of the one subject which had interested us these last few days—the two who had planted these trees, had sown these flowers, had arranged these arbours, and then, having lived with each other and for each other, without need of society, now slept in the same tomb. We had visited this tomb the preceding evening. It stood among the tall grass in the nave of an ancient abbey destroyed by Cromwell's soldiers which now served as a cemetery. The Comtesse Germaine was, that afternoon and in that peaceful walled garden, more occupied than I had ever seen her before with the emotional side of these two destinies, so unhappy, in the opinion of the French Corcieux; and she felt, as I did, that this had been one of those realized dreams of which one scarcely dares conceive. The pair of horses, the half-row of pearls, the season at Cannes: how remote all these things were from her gentle soul at that moment, as she talked with me about girl friends of hers who had married unhappily, of the happiness she had had in meeting Maxime, of the fear that society

sometimes caused her, when she thought of the future of this happiness! They were confidences naïve and almost too frank that she would never have made to a half-stranger like myself, had not certain very deep chords been set vibrating in her since her arrival at Neptune Vale.

Walking with very slow steps upon the bluish sand of these alleys, I was reflecting once again upon the mystery of human souls, and that the creature seemingly most frivolous, least capable of the lofty emotions of the heart, might conceal treasures of the finest feeling, unknown to others, unknown to herself, when suddenly the most commonplace of incidents interrupted us: her, in her innocent effusiveness; me, in my silent philosophizing. It was, first, on the other side of the wall, the shrill and repeated cry of a cock, then the voice of a little boy, exclaiming in bad English which I could scarcely understand:

"Now I have him! I have him!" then, with distress, "oh, he hurts me too much!" and a woman's voice replying, "The garden door is open, let him go in there; then he cannot get away." And almost instantly we saw dash in through this door the object of this furious pursuit. It was, in fact, a very large and very handsome cock, which fled, screaming with terror and anger, as fast as his feet could move. His wings had been already tied by his pursuer, one of Paddy's children, who had earlier been presented to our notice

as the godson of Comte Jules. The child had a stone in his hand which he flung, the instant he entered the garden, with such strength and skill that the cock fell stunned. In two leaps he was upon the bird, and seized it with hands torn by the creature's beak, showing the fierceness of the preceding struggle. Then we saw him go, laden with his prey, towards an old woman, who, in turn, appeared in the doorway, and repeated:

"Hold him tight, Jules, hold him, hold him; but don't kill him! He must be alive in order to have *the thing* succeed."

"I feel his heart beating quick," the child rejoined, "but, Aunt Harriet, let us go, or grandfather will be coming out."

"It is the Harriet of the Banshee, she who was not willing to see us," whispered Madame de Corcieux to me. "What a horrid old witch! Let us follow them, and see what she will do with the creature."

"Probably she will make soup of him," I said, also speaking low, but laughing, "unless there is some national dish to be prepared for your benefit."

"The little boy would not be afraid of his grandfather, if that were the case. But be careful that she does not see us."

Exchanging these whispered observations, we reached the door through which the child, the cock, and the old woman had disappeared. Mme. de Corcieux looked out carefully, then beckoned me to follow. The avenue

of the park which ended at the garden door was bordered with those great fuchsias of which I have already spoken, just now in flower. My companion advised me to conceal myself, following her example, behind this crimson-flowered shrubbery. I obeyed her suggestion, beginning now to believe that we were about to witness some singular scene. Very soon we saw the wisdom of having done this; for, when she had reached the end of this avenue, the old woman turned suddenly to assure herself that no one had seen her. It must be acknowledged that her appearance justified the most gloomy apprehensions. She was tall, and her meagreness was rendered still more striking by the extreme pallor of her long face. She had a black woollen shawl over her head, after the fashion of a *mantilla*, and from under it escaped elf-locks of gray hair. In her dark eyes there was all the wild, fanatic anguish of one of those victims of melancholia, who, in ancient times, were by turns regarded as prophetesses, and as demoniacs. Though modern science sees only disease in these phenomena, it is obliged to acknowledge that singular gifts of imagination and intuition accompany them. Thus is explained the prestige these half-insane beings enjoy among the simple-minded, a prestige which at times invests them with a real majesty. I saw Mme. de Corcieux shudder at the aspect of this strange figure. Fortunately the woman did not see us, and, reassured by the solitude, she went on with the

child, who carried the cock, designed for a sacrifice whose savage character I shall never forget.

The old woman and the boy now turned off from the avenue and walked along by the side of one of the farm buildings till they arrived at a narrow alley, having a door at its remote end. They were so absorbed that we were able, without attracting their attention, to reach a shed opposite to the place where they were. There, concealed behind a woodpile, we saw—with what horror!—the old woman draw from her pocket a knife, and the child hold the bird's neck towards her, into which she twice plunged the knife; then, taking the cock into her own hands, she sprinkled the ground with its blood, which spurted in a blackish jet. While she eagerly busied herself in this frightful occupation, a voice cried, "Harriet! Jules!" and the steward, Johnny Corrigan, himself stepped out from an adjacent barn. Ever since we had arrived at Neptune Vale it had been, as we learned afterwards, this worthy man's principal care to keep watch upon his violent and irresponsible sister. Twenty minutes earlier he had chanced to go, as he did many times daily, to make sure that she was quiet in her room, under the care of the little boy, her guardian for the afternoon. Not finding either, he had proceeded to search for them. Reaching the corner of the narrow alley he now caught sight of the boy, running away at full speed in the opposite direction; and at the end of the lane, before the door,

the old woman, her knife in one hand, the slaughtered fowl in the other, and not for a moment interrupting her sanguinary work. We heard her call out to him, without turning round: "What is it you want, Johnny? You must wait till I have done."

"This is what you are doing, then, when I am not here!" said the brother. His rugged face, which we saw in profile, expressed a singular mixture of fear and indignation, and what he said showed us that the two emotions were mingled in his thoughts. "Are you a Christian or a heathen?" he continued, speaking very roughly. "Has not Father O'Shaughnessy twenty times forbidden you to have anything to do with the spirits?"

"Father O'Shaughnessy would not come and drive them away," the old woman replied. "I help myself as I can. Our fathers were quite as good Christians as any of us are; and you know just as well as I do this was the only way they had to keep the dead from coming back, when a house was haunted. They will never come again now," she said solemnly, smearing with her wrinkled hand the blood over the threshold of the door. "They will never come again; I shall be able to sleep without seeing my old master and my old mistress. Since these others have been here, running over the house like lamplighters, their faces have been too sad; I could not bear it. I *could not*. But," she ended, "I am contented now; *they will avenge themselves!*"

She uttered these enigmatic words with a passionate

energy that seemed to exhaust her. For nearly a minute she remained silent, crouching on the ground, her head covered by her shawl. Then slowly, slowly she began to lament, uttering hoarse and inarticulate groans, which seemed to restore a little energy to her brother, who had been standing motionless and, as it were, struck dumb by his sister's vociferation. He now went straight towards her, he took from her hands the slaughtered cock and the knife and placed them both behind a stone, no doubt with the intention of removing, at some later time, these traces of the scene of sorcery; then seizing the old woman around the waist, he lifted her from the ground with a facility which proved his extraordinary strength for a man of his years, and carried her into the house, closing the door behind him.

The whole scene had been so rapid and, at the same time, so weird, that neither Mme. de Corcieux nor I had had time or presence of mind to exchange a single remark. When we looked at each other, as the door closed, I saw that my companion was extremely pale and trembled visibly. I remembered what her husband had said as to her tendencies towards superstition, and I endeavoured to put an end to this nervous excitement by speaking jocosely.

"If anybody had told you," I said, laughing, "that you would witness the sacrifice of a cock by an Irish sorceress, you would have been much surprised."

"Don't laugh," the young woman broke in, grasping my arm, "you will bring us misfortune. You heard her, *'they will avenge themselves!'*"

"Oh, come!" I said, rendered very anxious by her tone, "you are not going to suppose that Comte Jules and Comtesse Françoise have chosen, for their return to earth, the bedroom of this crazy old woman, or that the blood of this cock, sprinkled on the threshold, is going to send them back into their tomb, like figures of Jack-in-the-box."

"I suppose nothing," she rejoined; "but I know that I am afraid."

"Afraid of what?" I urged.

"That they will really avenge themselves, as this woman says," she answered; and passing her hand over her eyes, like a person awaking from an unpleasant dream, she continued: "It is this house, this country, these people, this way of living, so different from our own, which produces on me the effect of a story out of the Arabian Nights! You will believe I am insane. Ah! let us not think of it any more! But," and there came a flash of entreaty into her blue eyes, "do not say anything to Maxime about all this till I have told him myself,—not till after we have left here,—not to distract him also."

"I promise," was my reply; "but you must promise, also, that you will not give way to this impression you spoke of just now."

"I promise, too," she said, with a nervous start. "It is all over now, you see. But let us go indoors, for fear we should seem to be spying upon these poor people."

The charming young creature was sincere in her desire to control herself, through a regard for her husband's peace of mind, whose growing scruples, hesitations, remorse almost, she knew better than I did. She was successful through the whole evening, which passed peacefully enough and without any allusion being made to the weird scene of local manners of which chance had rendered us the witnesses. But, as the moment approached for us to separate for the night, I could read in her candid eyes a reawakening terror, no doubt the fear of seeing appear in the darkness of midnight those two visitors from the other world, whose presence old Harriet had so solemnly sought to avert. And for myself, why should I conceal it? Surrounded as I had been for the last three days by the emotional suggestiveness which the whole place exhaled, touched by the picture of the little drawing-room animated for the last time by our group, deafened by the noise of the wind, which was now even more violent than in the afternoon, and roared like a threatening tempest around the house, I yielded to this contagious depression of spirit. The portraits of Comte Jules and Comtesse Françoise on the walls of this room, which chanced to be, moreover, two of the latest of the series, might have become alive, the aged gentleman and his wife might have come down from their

frames, without my being very much astonished at it. Maxime de Corcieux himself, though very unsusceptible to impressions of this kind, seemed ill at ease, and said to me with a real sigh of relief, as we bade each other good night:

"This is our last evening here, I am glad to say! The place is really too sad. If Crawford comes early enough, as I have written him to do, we will take the afternoon train. At any rate, we shall get ready to go, and, *ma foi!* I almost think we might cross by the night boat. But if this wind continues, it will be rough."

When it is a question of occurrences that seem to contain an element of the supernatural, the first duty of him who relates them is to omit none of the facts in the case which authorize the simpler explanation. Accordingly, I have made it a point to detail minutely the incidents of the afternoon and evening, at the risk of taking from the dénouement of this adventure a certain charm of mystery. I can now relate this dénouement more readily, making no attempt to draw from it any conclusion.

On the following morning, when I found myself at the breakfast table opposite Germaine and Maxime de Corcieux, I perceived at once that she was even more nervous than she had been the evening before. The quiver of her eyelids, her anxiety of manner, her voice, her paleness—all betrayed that she had passed a very

disturbed night. But as she made no allusion to old Harriet or to ghosts, I judged that she had merely been the victim of an insomnia only too natural after the violent shock of the day. This nervousness increased as the time drew near for Mr. Crawford's arrival, and when the car which brought the money-lender drew up before the door, I could see the hands of the young wife tremble almost convulsively. But she said not a word to her husband which could betray the true cause of her singular condition.

"You will pardon me if I leave you," she had said simply, rising, and indicating that she was about to leave the room by another door.

"I depend upon you," Maxime said to me, "to make her listen to reason, while I bring this tiresome business to a conclusion."

"*Eh bien!*" said Germaine to me, as soon as we were both outside the house, "*I have seen them!*"

"You have seen them?" I said, without courage to resume a bantering tone, so full of terrified conviction was her voice.

"Yes, I have seen them. Not as Harriet did," she added. "For it was only a dream, and I know all that you can say to me about dreams. I have been saying it to myself all the morning, to keep from telling Max. We were in a boat, Max and I, on this channel here that we crossed by the causeway when we came. The water at first was perfectly calm. Then it began

to be rough, with white caps, and the wind to blow with the greatest fury. We were very near the shore, and I was turning to Max to beg him to row hard that we might get in, when I saw, seated behind him, Comte Jules and Comtesse Françoise, dressed exactly as they are in one of the pictures. They looked at me with eyes that froze me with such terror that I could not speak, and, at the same moment, an enormous wave broke over us. I felt myself washed into the sea, and Max also. My distress was so great that I waked," she ended, putting her hand to her side, "with such a beating of my heart! I haven't gotten over it yet."

"But all this is perfectly easy to explain," I rejoined; "if you will think of it, you will find all the elements of this bad dream. The old woman killing the cock impressed you very deeply. You thought about ghosts, you remember. Yesterday's wind was violent, and your husband spoke of a rough passage. Put all these little things together, and you have your dream."

"No," she said, speaking in so low a tone that I could scarcely hear her, "*it is a warning.*"

"A warning?" I said. "And of what?"

She made no reply, and I did not venture to repeat my question. To oblige her to render her ideas more distinct by putting them into words, was to risk increasing still further the fever of superstition which had seized

upon her. We walked for a few moments silently—for two minutes' time, perhaps—along one of the avenues near the house. We could see in the distance the blue edge of the lagoon, in an incoming tide. The eyes of my companion were fixed upon the fascinating glitter of the water with an expression that became really so anxious that at last I said:

"Are you feeling less well? Perhaps it would be better to go indoors?"

"Yes," she said, in an abrupt voice; "I must go in." She repeated, "I must go in, at once—at once." Then, ceasing to pay any attention to my presence and speaking aloud to herself: "No, I will not let him do it. I cannot, I ought not. O God! grant that I be not too late!" she exclaimed, in a tone of the deepest distress, as if her vision of the night had come back to her. With that she began to run towards the house as rapidly as she could. I made no attempt to detain her, so startled I was with the abruptness of her resolve. I saw her delicate figure, so graceful and slender in her gray travelling dress, disappear through the door of the ancient building which she had evidently gone to protect against destruction, by seeking to prevent its sale to Crawford—notwithstanding the pair of Russian horses, and the jeweller of the rue de la Paix with his pearls, and Monte Carlo and its temptations! I looked at the old house. What a fine, dignified old building it was; how picturesque and homelike! Thinking of all the human

life within those walls over which the ivy quivered, in that French garden with its meditative Neptune, under those superb trees still tossed by the same high wind as yesterday, I remember I wished with all my heart that this insane attempt, instigated though it was by a childish motive, might be successful; and when I saw Crawford just then leaving the house and getting into his car, his broad countenance visibly clouded, I had an instant of genuine satisfaction, very quickly confirmed by Maxime's own words.

"What is it?" I asked.

"What is it?" he rejoined with a shrug. "You promised me that you would make Germaine listen to reason; and in she comes just at the moment, just as this Crawford was beginning to make *me* nervous. She relates to me a dream which I don't understand at all. She weeps. She implores. In short, it is broken off. I shall *not* sell the place. But it is perfectly absurd. All this on account of a silly dream. I am out of all patience with myself for giving way."

"Ah!" said his wife, clinging to his arm, and, for the first time in my presence, using the affectionate *tu*, "think of the happiness of these poor Corriganes when you tell them that you will keep the house, and keep them also, if they would like to stay."

V

Two days after this decision, so comically unexpected, as we were taking tea in the little drawing-room, waited on by the two daughters of old Corrigan, now radiant with delight at not leaving Neptune Vale, Germaine de Corcieux in carelessly opening a Dublin paper, which continued coming to the address of Comte Jules, uttered a little cry. She seemed scarcely able to believe her eyes, which dilated with terror, and, with a hand which trembled even more than it did at the moment when she was relating to me her dream, she pointed out to Maxime and me one of those sensational titles dear to Anglo-Saxon newspapers: "Terrible collision at sea near Holyhead. Forty lives lost." And the article described a collision in the fog, and the wreck of the steamer which had left Dublin the night before. More than forty passengers had perished.

"You see," she said to Maxime, "you see that it *was* they who came to tell me, and how wise we were to listen to them."

As she spoke she looked up at the two portraits hanging motionless in the hall with their old faces worn by the passage of years, and tears of gratitude were in her blue eyes, while Maxime replied:

"It is a strange coincidence. Very strange," he repeated; then, looking over the paragraph in his turn, he shrugged his shoulders. "It was not the mail boat," he

said, "and consequently we should have taken the other."

As a matter of reason, the young man's scepticism was justified. This maritime tragedy, following upon the young woman's dream, was one of those accidental things explicable by a coincidence which may happen once in ten million times. It is equally certain that some chance might have induced the two young people to take passage on the fated boat; and was Germaine absolutely wrong in believing that they were saved by the late owners of Neptune Vale? There are many ways in which the dead can act upon us, and who shall dare to say that some portion of their souls may not remain, living and acting, in places where they have loved with that love, stronger than the grave, which was known to the two who died at Neptune Vale?

IV

A WOMAN'S CHARITY

IV

A WOMAN'S CHARITY

I

I WAS on my way from Paris to Nice for the carnival of February, 189-, and stopped at Toulon to visit my friend Georges de Baltine, who had hired the shooting for the season on Port Cros, one of the islands opposite Hyères, and had invited me to the place. I must confess that, in setting off on this expedition, I had taken my gun only from decency. I was actuated mainly by the long-felt desire to explore these too little known islands, which the ancients called *Stoichades*, the "Ranged in a Row," and mediæval monks mention as the Golden Islands, doubtless on account of the mica with which they scintillate, seeming at sunset to be covered with the glitter of yellow metal. How many times from the hills of Hyères have I seen between the pale blue sky and the dark blue sea, their long, wooded line and rocky cliffs! How many times, on my way to Italy or Greece, have I passed on a steamer between these cliffs and the

shore, near enough to see the deep valleys of Porquerolles and Port Cros, abounding in Aleppo pines, the barren rock of Bagnaud, and the wild plains of Titan! One night, in particular, passing by these islands, I inhaled so strong and sweet a fragrance of aromatic plants—that fragrance of the thicket, so well known to all who have passed near Corsica with the wind blowing in certain directions—that this aroma haunted me for days and days. How could I say no to a friendly comrade who offered me a pretext for such convenient gratification of a curiosity awakened years before?

We French have a genius for rendering almost inaccessible the most beautiful nooks of our beautiful country, while extolling with enthusiasm foreign scenes not equal to our own; and this visit, which would have been a very simple matter, if there were a line of steamers between these islands and Hyères, involved really a journey. One must remain over night at Toulon and rise at six, to take a little steamer at seven, which reaches Port Cros about noon, after touching at Porquerolles. Moreover, these boats—there are two, plying alternately—only make two trips a week. They sail from that Quai de la Darse Vieille which is so warm to the eye in sunny afternoons, and is decorated by Puget, with two Atlantides of heroic size, writhing in painful and brutal muscularity, beneath the balcony which they support. When I arrived on this quay,

on a morning in February, the sky was still full of stars. It was scarcely yet the break of day, and the whole scene of the harbour was drowned in a twilight shadow, which gave to the forms of the vessels at anchor in this vast roadstead an aspect as of phantoms. The cafés, already opened, were brilliant with gas, and on the pavement of the quay, forbidden to vehicles there was a rapid tramping of hurried pedestrians. Officers and sailors, marines and employees, boatmen and cabin-boys, were coming and going, most of them in uniform, shivering from being so early awakened, and walking rapidly because of the cold, which soon gained also upon me. I had arrived from Paris the preceding day, on one of those afternoons in the Provençal winter as mild as a day in spring. Once more, notwithstanding long experience of this changeful climate and its surprises, I had taken for my excursion only a thin overcoat under which I shivered, and it was not without apprehension that I looked at the steamer upon which I was to pass the five hours of the voyage. She was a boat of perhaps sixty tons, everywhere bearing trace of a primitive and utilitarian simplicity: the cabin for the passengers was a little enclosed space between decks, having wooden benches for seats; it was very low-studded, glazed on all sides, and without any means of heating. Only a cast-iron stove, set up in the open air, glowed in the corner of the forward forecandle gangway; a cook, whose breadth of shoulder

betrayed him to be a common sailor, was preparing the crew's breakfast in a greasy copper saucepan whence escaped a violent odour of garlic. Three other sailors — the engineer, his assistant, and a cabin-boy — completed this crew. They were occupied, without haste, with southern tranquillity, in the preparations for departure, which consisted in piling up in the hold, quite at random, the boxes and baskets destined for the two hundred inhabitants of Porquerolles and Port Cros. Some women arrived, bringing packages, with verbal directions in patois. The men replied in the same speech and interrupted their work to talk. The social character of this marine stage-coach received a picturesque element from the strongly marked types of these fellows. Sons of the country, they had in their faces — in their extremely black eyes, their sunburnt complexions, their strong features — that Saracenic heredity so marked, along this coast, where the mountains are still called "Maurettes," in memory of the African pirates and their many invasions. But these descendants of the old corsairs had nothing formidable about them except their looks. They chattered, laughed, gesticulated, idled about, under the supervision of the captain, a Hercules of fifty, with blue eyes in a very red face, and having as insignia of his station nothing more than a black cloth cap with gilt braid. Except for this he was dressed like his men. Overalls of coarse blue linen protected his cloth trou-

sers, and he worked like the others, without any false dignity, seizing a package, stowing a box, parleying over a personal commission. The slowness with which preparations went forward, the load still in a heap upon the deck, the lack of any smoke from the smokestack, the non-appearance of the passengers—in visiting the cabin, I had remarked some travelling rugs in rolls, two dressing-bags, and a gun-case, doubtless the luggage of another guest on his way to Baltine, but no one there to guard them—all rendered improbable a punctual departure at seven o'clock. I went to complain to the captain.

"The *Pearl* will not go punctually to-day?" I asked.

"You did not read the notice, then, that we put up aft?" he replied. "We are waiting for some returned soldiers from Madagascar who are to be transported to the Sanitarium of Porquerolles."

"But when did you put up your notice?" said an angry voice behind me. "Just half an hour ago! I saw you doing it. I was there."

I turned and recognized an individual whom I had noticed not long before, walking up and down on the quay. In the darkness I had not clearly observed his costume, which indicated plainly that the gun-case must belong to him. He was a handsome fellow of about thirty, very robust, whose big frame was made still bigger by a shooting-ulster with complicated pockets, and by its rough material, almost hairy, plainly of Eng-

lish make. His cap of the same stuff, his thick knitted gloves, his strong yellow shoes, completed his aspect of the elegant and substantial sportsman. He was the perfect type of a kind of individual whom I know well, the man of wealth and strong physique, who has reduced life to the physical joy of violent exercise, taken, however, under excellent conditions of personal comfort. Many modern nobles are of this stamp in France, since the diminution of fortunes, which inevitably results from the Civil Code and equality of inheritance, has compelled them to return to country life. These men, as a rule, have begun with some years in the army. They have been cavalry officers up to the date of their marriage. Then they resigned, and went to live on their estates, a life somewhat like that of the brutes, extremely narrow but wholesome. The more polished of these men, those who have still money enough for an apartment in Paris, have but little other use for the great city than as furnishing an opportunity to hunt several times in the week, to ride every day, and to enjoy a very superior *cuisine* at a club, a restaurant, or the houses of friends. This forms a character which has not been thoroughly studied as yet, wherein aristocratic prejudices and real traditions of high lineage strive for mastery, — an odd mixture of religion (sometimes even carried to an extreme) and materialism, of virile activity and childishness. There is something of the peasant in these vigorous fellows who live so near

the earth, and, like peasants, they are at once capable of all sorts of simplicity and all sorts of craftiness. Their apparent straightforwardness may conceal the roughest egoism. I was destined to find that this man followed only too well that law common to all personalities that are extremely penetrated with animalism. One does not live so near the brute without acquiring a certain resemblance to him.

"Yes," he insisted, "it was only this morning that you put up that notice; I saw it. But," and he turned to me without taking the trouble to lower his voice, "these southern men are not capable of doing things well! It's always 'about right.' And government, with its war-vessels here in the harbour, entrusting its sick soldiers to a little boat like this! It is probably some electoral trick. Monsieur," he continued, "permit me to make my own introduction to you. You are, no doubt, M. ——?" mentioning my name; and, on my affirmative reply, "I heard from Baltine that he expected you. I, monsieur, am le Comte de Mégret-Fajac. Baltine declares that he has at Port Cros the great and little bustard, the flamingo, the pink blackbird, the Corsican pheasant, the Algerian partridge, and migratory snipe and woodcock. We shall see. If he has called me away from Monte Carlo and pigeon shooting, to shoot thrushes, I shall not forgive him. But there is Mme. de Mégret-Fajac. I will present you to her. We were here at quarter to seven sharp. When she

learned the delay, she went to church to see if she could have a mass. Five hours at sea is a dangerous voyage for a woman. They think it's quite right to disturb *le bon Dieu* for that! Will you take a cigar?"

Giving me one of the black Havanas which he was thus smoking before breakfast, with a freedom which proved the strength of his stomach and his lack of nerves, my future shooting companion made me go with him a few steps along the quay to meet a young woman who came out from a cross-street, accompanied by her maid. I have, in my life, seen several married couples who were ill mated. Rarely have I encountered one where antipathy of nature was more evident. Mme. de Mégret had in her entire being as much delicacy, almost morbidness, as her husband had strength, almost coarseness. Under the thickness of her heavy fur coat that cold winter morning, one could detect a graceful, slender figure, and under her double veil a little face, with delicate features, a colourless complexion, and very beautiful eyes, of a blue so dark as to be almost purple. Just to meet these shy, gentle eyes gave one a desire to protect the too sensitive soul that looked at you through them. As plainly as the feet and hands of the comte were seen to be big, solid implements for walking and grasping, did the feet and hands of the Comtesse, even in the heavy travelling boots and strong dogskin gloves, give the impression of dainty, fragile toys. While the damp, icy air of the morning stimulated the blood of

the brown athlete who was the husband, the young wife shivered visibly with the cold, although she had been walking. To have risen so early had exhausted her strength for the whole day. It was not, I would have wagered, against the perils of the voyage, that she had gone to pray to God. She was much more likely to have asked for strength to conceal her discomfort from her lord and master, not to spoil for him a pleasure which to her was a punishment; and the sweetest feminine nature vibrated in the submissive accent with which, the presentation being made, she questioned this formidable husband.

"You have not been cold, Alfred? I was a little longer because we were misdirected at first. We had to go to two churches. At last we got our mass. But what are we still waiting for, do you know?"

"Yes, I do, now," rejoined M. de Mégret, in a singularly rough tone; "some fellows home from Madagascar, who are to be taken to a sanitarium."

Was I mistaken? It seemed to me that, in saying these words, he gave the sentence almost an aggressive sound. Yes. A reproach, direct and personal, had come into his voice; and it seemed to me that at the words, simple as they were, the young woman's eyelids had quivered nervously. It was but a shade of meaning, and I should doubtless have forgotten it, if this first index had not received afterwards a too significant light. We had now begun to pace back and forth along the quay,

where the gas had just been extinguished, and we were talking, after the manner of Parisians, testing each other, seeking common friends as a pretext to gratify the national passion for anecdote and criticism. And this test rarely fails. It quickly allows one to estimate the intelligence and good feeling of him or of her with whom one talks in this way. I had no difficulty in discerning here again the radical antagonism between this husband and wife. The comtesse displayed as much indulgent grace in praising people as her husband a rude pleasure in speaking ill of them. In less than a half-hour, the latter had related to me a dozen of those stories, already well known to every one, which are current in the clubs and salons of Paris—all of them false or exaggerated, all of them dealing with the same personages: four or five titled or rich old harridans, and as many more young or old *viveurs*, of whom one has grown tired to the degree of never hearing their names without desiring to say as a man said, at the period of infatuation for a noble personality, too much applauded, later, too much decried: "What consoles me in dying is that I shall never hear any more about the Great Frenchman!" I distinctly saw Alice de Mégret suffer from this vulgarity. She had, in talking, a voice after the style of her face, frail, timid, modest, with passages, at certain moments, *veiled*, so to speak. I am no longer at an age, alas! when a person unknown but yesterday takes in one's heart a place for ever her own; but,

coming and going along that quay's edge, I was thinking all the time:

"What a delightful friend that young woman would be! What a cousin — especially, what a sister! How one would love to ask her advice; to come to her if one were unhappy; to seek consolation from her for the wrong others had done us! If she is truly what her eyes, her manners, her voice declare her to be, one would not even have dared to love her. How came she to marry this fellow? It must have been that she yielded to some family expediency. The women of a too tender race, the Cordelias, all come to this: they are daughters and mothers, rather than wives. At eighteen, in obedience to a parental wish, they sacrifice their entire lives; at forty, they are slaves to their children, who, as a rule, break the mother's heart. But this one, it seems, has no children. So much the better. If she had them, I should only have pitied her the more, the father being what he is."

I had gone thus far in my reflections, which were probably quite unsuspected by her who was their object, when the loud ringing of a bell from the boat caused us to turn back, and we perceived the captain, standing in the stern, vigorously swinging his big brass bell to summon his passengers and his crew.

"Quarter past eight!" said M  gret, looking at his watch. "Now if we have to delay at Porquerolles to land those fellows, we shall not be at Baltine's before three

o'clock, and where shall we breakfast? I think myself, when a man invites his friends to an island, he should send his yacht for them."

"Perhaps we shall arrive sooner," suggested Mme. de Mégret; "the sea is very smooth; look at it."

"And the soldiers are very few, I observe," I added.

"What!" exclaimed Mégret, "is it for these four miserable objects that we have been kept waiting two hours?"

"What can we do about it, monsieur?" said the captain, with that serenity of the official who is obeying orders, so peculiar to France; "we are paid by the State; we must follow our instructions."

II

And, in fact, on the deck when we went on board there were but four soldiers. Two belonged to the artillery, one to the chasseurs, and the fourth, to a company of native sharp-shooters. This was a man of negro or Kabyle race, so wasted by fever that his black skin looked actually green. All four were frightfully emaciated, their bones projecting, their cheeks hollow, their teeth showing long under the livid lips, their eyes glittering with that light that betrays the long poisoning of fever. The three white men had also so greenish a colouring that only in the shape of the face and the form of the lips were they different from their com-

panion. The torn cloak, the shapeless *képi*, the disgusting slovenliness of the shoes and gaiters, the absence of linen—all betrayed in these poor fellows the radical carelessness of the common soldier, who has suffered too much in tent and hospital; he has become demoralized, and has lost that fine neatness about his uniform without which there is no army. Illness had broken the spring, in their case. It had made them poor animals, merely, jaded with fatigue, and desiring nothing except to have a little relief from suffering. They were all close to the railing, seated on their knapsacks, and they took no notice of the curiosity their appearance excited. Seeing them so pitiable and so vanquished, I forgot to speculate longer as to the more or less of happiness of the married couple with whom I was to make the voyage. I am not, certainly, of those who put the sufferings of the flesh above moral sufferings, in the scale of human trials. I know that a woman, young, pretty, and surrounded with luxury, may endure, in the midst of it all, agonies of heart which equal in intensity the most cruel physical agonies. But it is a fact that the human creature suffering in body affects our nerves, when he is present under our eyes, in a way that makes it impossible for us to pity equally the one who suffers in mind only. This is the case with doctors, whom the story of the worst case of moral distress commonly leaves altogether unmoved. Their charity stands open to the creature who is thirsty, is hungry, bleeds; it is shut

against the suffering which regrets, repents, despairs. It is because physical distress cannot be a matter of doubt; and the other distress, that of the soul, is always open to the suspicion of being imaginary. Mme. de Mégret might be—was, in fact,—much more unhappy than my sympathy had divined. But the misfortune was *invisible*; while at the first glance towards these victims of that terrible colonial war I saw their sufferings, and I felt them in my own flesh.

Meanwhile the whistle had sounded, and we were off, with a rapid motion that told the power of the engine imprisoned in this “little boat,” as Mégret had disrespectfully called it. The *Pearl* was an old yacht, of British build. This was proved by the “Built in Glasgow” still inscribed on her stern. She retained from her noble origin the valuable qualities of speed and stiffness. The captain, piqued by my companion’s reproaches, no doubt, made a point of showing the merit of his boat, of which, like all true sailors, he was proud, for I heard him say to the comte :

“You will not find so good a sailer as the *Pearl* from Genoa to Marseilles, when she is very light, as she is to-day, and has this little breeze. If the company did not scant me in coal, I could be at Port Cros in an hour. We were out in a storm last week when the squadron didn’t dare leave the harbour. But to-day! What weather! And if you were to go the world over, you would find nothing better than this coast.”

Though the worthy captain of the *Pearl* showed in what he said about the squadron a large amount of Marseillais imagination notwithstanding his blue northern eyes, he spoke truly when he praised the magnificence of the roadstead on such a glorious morning. The unfortunate soldiers had made me forget the young comtesse, and this scenery was now making me forget the unfortunate soldiers. In the distance the mountains which shut in Toulon reared their rough, arid masses, black in places with a burned vegetation, gray with barren rock in others, and everywhere from the streaked water of the immense basin rose ships of the line; here ancient frigates, with many decks, painted lead colour, and sadly dismasted; there modern armoured vessels and torpedo boats, with their outlines like factories. Small boats glided or flew between these vessels and the piers, rowed by uniformed sailors, who handled their dozen, their twenty-four, oars with miraculous precision; the blades rose and fell perfectly in line, and the boats appeared to have their two wings, like the white gulls which flew over, beating the blue air with their supple white plumes tipped with black, whose rustle we seemed to hear. Now and then they came down with a cry, sharp as a wail, and one could see them snatch with the beak some morsel floating on the water; then they were off again, with their strong flight. Others, who had done feeding, were swimming like swans upon the surface, cradled fearlessly in the furrows left by moving vessels.

When the *Pearl* had passed out through the channel which is guarded by the Fort de l'Eguillette, and directed her course towards Cape La Malue and Cape Brun, a line of coast appeared, as luminous, as beautiful, as if the little steamer, instead of going from Toulon to Porquerolles, was on her way from the Piræus to Chalcis, or from Nauplia to Catacolo. The noble crest of the mountains continued to be outlined white and clear against the deep blue of the sky. The sea fringed each little creek with its silvery hem, and between the red rocks of these little coves and the lower spurs of the mountains there was an undulating growth of olive-trees and pines and cork-trees, studded with painted villas and country-houses. Fashion, fortunately, has not yet touched this region of Provence, which, as far as the odd-shaped peninsula of Giens, thrown out in the form of a T, retains its beautiful, wild aspect, that inexpressible charm of a second Greece, so brilliant, so graceful in its rocky sterility. It needs but a ruined colonnade on a height to complete the illusion, so nearly have this sky and this sea, these mountains and this sand, the same tone of transparent light that is seen in Attica or the Peloponnesus; and, about it all the same quivering, subtle, alert air which one only needs to breathe, it would seem, to be gay with the light gayety of the Greeks and the Provençaux!

It was written that this radiant landscape should be associated for me with incidents of a very different

order, and that I should experience once more, in these pagan surroundings, impressions altogether incompatible with that gayety. And, indeed, will it ever be truly ours, ever belong to us complicated children of the North? At a moment, as I was turning to look at the open sea, I perceived Mme. de Mégret alone at the other end of the boat. She stood leaning upon the rail, a few steps distant from the group formed by the four soldiers, and was observing them closely. They, meanwhile, seemed to be no more conscious of her observation than of the radiant sky and sea. They remained seated, almost crouching, upon their *bissacs*, just as they had placed themselves on arriving. Their worn faces showed the same bitter and indifferent impassiveness that had so impressed me. It was natural enough that a young and delicate woman, especially one belonging to Mme. de Mégret's social class, should be even more struck with this. It is so rare that in a certain environment of luxury a *grande dame* should ever see any practical illustration of the savage inequality of fate! A spoiled child of society, enjoying as a matter of course a hothouse atmosphere around her slightest, most transient indispositions, why should she not be seized with remorse to see with her own eyes that there are human beings, her fellow-creatures, who do not sleep in beds, who do not go south in the winter and to the Alps in summer, but endure, now the rigour of the icy winter, now the ardour of a

torrid summer, in climates most unwholesome; beings who go and come not whither their whim leads them, but whither an implacable discipline orders, without money in their pockets, without affection around them, without the domestic hearth; like slaves, for a time only, it is true, but, all the same, like slaves. I thought that I detected this pity in the young woman's sad attitude. She was again in contrast with the joviality of her husband. The latter, whose loud voice I now heard, was in the cabin of the captain, with whom he had become reconciled. The cigar which the worthy sailor was smoking, an exact counterpart of M. de Mégret's, attested this harmony. Leaning over a chart of the coast, they sipped brandy as they talked. Their words reached me interrupted by the jerks of the engine, and names of animals which I overheard proved that Mégret was making inquiries about the shooting in the country. From an instinct of sympathy which was destined to involve me most unexpectedly in a very intimate secret, I crossed the deck to join the comtesse. I accosted her, calling her attention to the soldiers.

"How plainly one sees that they have suffered," I said.

"Yes," she repeated; "how they have suffered! It has been truly said that it was a very hard campaign. God knows what they must have passed through!"

"Would you like to have me make them talk?" I

said. "We should know more by two or three sentences from these poor fellows than from all the newspapers."

"I did not venture to ask you to do it," she said, a trifle of colour coming into her face, and an expression which later I was able to understand better. At the moment, I saw in it only a proof of her native timidity. She knew me so slightly. We crossed over to where the soldiers were. It was an artilleryman who raised his head first when we had stopped near the little group.

"You are glad to be back in France?" I said.

"It is sure we are better off here," the man replied. "If only we had fought out there! But it wasn't worth the trouble for us and the guns to have been those twenty-two days at sea. We never even saw the enemy. As soon as we got there they set us to carting casks of arrack from Majunga to Andriba. Five hundred negroes and two hundred mules could have done it just as well, and we should not have had to bury so many of our men in the cemeteries of Majunga and Marololo."

"Not to mention those we threw overboard in the Red Sea," his comrade said; "forty, on our boat alone, as we came back."

"You had the luck of drinking the arrack to strengthen you," said the sharp-shooter, with a spectral smile. "We had it, too, for rations, but we died like flies, all the

same. We began the road for the Lefèvre carriages. What carriages they were! You remember, all broken where the shafts joined the body. They mended them with branches of trees; but, at last, they threw them away, and burned them up nights, on the mountain. But it was hot, days! And cold, nights! And how the men died!"

He shrugged his shoulders and relapsed into apathy. The fourth soldier, the sergeant of chasseurs, had not yet spoken. He was a fellow with good features, but a dark, almost savage look. He had watched us with a sort of envious spite and a wicked gleam in his eyes. I should have hesitated about speaking to him, if Mme. de Mégret had not suddenly asked me, "Do you speak English?" and, when I replied affirmatively, added, speaking in English herself, and in a voice whose emotion surprised me even at that moment: "Will you ask the fourth one about his life out there?"

"And you, chasseur," I said, "was it your employment to cart liquor and make roads?"

"I?" said the young man, with a shrug, "not even that I was under a tent all the time. It was very bad. The thermometer was 102° where we encamped. Not a tree except bananas here and there, which make no more shade than my arm," and he extended it. "This pleasant life of ours began at Majunga, and continued in Subervieville. Such a garrison as we were! The major had pity on us, and put us into the half-burned huts of the inhabi-

tants. We did a little better then. But how we suffered ! All day long bringing in the sick on litters. There were five hundred in the hospital at once, and seven nurses. No rest by day on account of the heat ; no sleep by night on account of the mosquitoes. In the beginning we said to ourselves, it will be hot, and that's all. But the heat was different from any other, damp and poisonous. We ate, and the food did us no good. We drank, and nothing quenched our thirst. And so we grew weak and very thin. Then we had fever and a sort of delirium. The men thought they were at home ; then they died. Those who sent us out, ought to go there themselves for a month ; a month would be enough. Cursed land ! how many of us it has devoured ! ”

The sergeant closed his eyes, as if to shut out the frightful spectacle. For a moment his face looked like that of a dead man. We both started with horror, Mme. de Mégret and I. I saw her fingers cling convulsively around the handle of a little green leather satchel that she carried, and in an even lower tone she said to me, still in English :

“ Will you ask him if the officers were as badly off as the men ? ”

“ The officers ? ” said the chasseur, when I had put the question to him. “ I buried two with my own hands, out of the four who were in charge of our camp. And they were good men. They lived the same life with us, under the same tents. Yes, we lost two, the captain and a lieu-

tenant. It was enough to break one's heart to see them walk at last, the lieutenant especially, a tall, handsome fellow. He was only a skeleton. He was to be sent home, but he died, and no wonder!"

I had not had time to ask myself why these new details produced a yet stronger impression upon the comtesse, who had grown deadly pale as she listened; for just at this moment the voice of Mégret interrupted us. He spoke to his wife in a tone of irritated harshness, which seemed to indicate displeasure at the conversation.

"Can you give me a few minutes, my dear Alice?" was what he said.

"I will come," she answered, in a voice scarcely audible; and directly the couple went aft, where their conversation seemed not agreeable to either, for the young woman withdrew almost immediately into the passengers' cabin, while Mégret lighted a fresh cigar and began smoking, looking persistently out to sea. He was ashamed of having yielded, in my presence, to an impulse which seemed to me, I must confess, even more mysterious than brutal. Certainly he was not jealous of me. What had so deeply offended him was, then, that his wife had talked with these soldiers. I suddenly remembered his ill humour on learning that these soldiers from Madagascar were to cross with us. The anxiety of the comtesse that I should question the poor men, and the distress which the details of the

suffering of the expedition had caused her, her inquiry about the officers — all seemed to unite in giving a probable key to the enigma. With the novelist's strange facility in constructing an imaginary and guilty story out of material in itself innocent, I had thought out a complicated drama of society: Mme. de Mégret madly in love with an officer; her husband on the point of discovering the affair; the young man departing for Madagascar, whence, later, he would return. And then I was ashamed to have admitted even the possibility of such an adventure in the case of a woman so modest and so devout. I said to myself that this had been all a dream, that M. de Mégret had wished to speak to his wife about some trifle, that she had then gone into the cabin to rest awhile, and that Mégret smoked in silence because my conversation was not interesting to him; and, finally, that there was nothing personal in the interest which the comtesse felt for these poor fellows from the Madagascan war.

Meantime an incident of a more positive kind occurred just then, which upset me so completely that I was incapable of any other thought. The shock was so great that, as I revert, even in memory, to that moment, something grips my heart. The least details of this picture rise before my eyes as if I were still there, standing against the funnel, with the steerage full in view. I see the cabin-boy, playing with a kitten, offering and withdrawing a morsel of fish, the cook singing over

his stove, the captain and the two sailors pointing out to each other, with much gesticulation, a point on the coast of Giens near by. And especially I see the four soldiers: three of them again silent and motionless, and the fourth, the sergeant—ah! the fourth, I see him watching keenly to see if any one is observing him. But all the faces are looking in other directions. The funnel hides me from his sight. He lifts his right arm as if to rest it on a coil of rope, and on this rope I perceive lying the little green satchel which Mme. de Mégret has accidentally left there. He moves his arm, and the satchel falls over on its side. Another slight motion, and it drops down between the rope and the railing. Again a sly glance, and now his hand is at work behind the coil of rope. The hand is withdrawn; it has opened the satchel and taken out something of metal which glitters for an instant between the closed fingers. Is it a jewel? a scent-bottle? a gold purse? Again a glance, and the satchel is very adroitly replaced upon the coil of rope. The man assumes an air of being annoyed by the sunlight; he leaves his place and comes to sit down in the shade not far from where I am standing, and I feel that I have looked away, my cheek reddened with shame, a lump in my throat, as if I were the thief myself and not he—this dying man who has just incurred military imprisonment—ten years of service at *Biribi*—as they call it, for the sake of appropriating a pretty toy belonging to whom? to a person in whose

eyes he must have read such tender pity for his sufferings and those of his comrades.

III

It has happened to me three times in my life to surprise a thief in the very act, and each time I have felt the same mixture of horror and pity, which upon that deck, and a witness to that action, completely paralyzed me. There is something frightful in having a man in one's presence who has just disgraced himself and cannot deny that disgrace. When that man wears a uniform, this cruel sensation is worse. It does not bring relief to know that the wrong-doing of an individual harms himself only; we are so accustomed to respect, to honour the dignity of the army, even in its humblest representatives, that an act of villainy committed by a soldier is absolutely shocking. And this one had but just returned from suffering for the country, from risking his life for her! The manner in which he had spoken of the campaign and of his officers showed bitter feelings, but manly, nevertheless. To what aberration had he yielded in rifling the lady's satchel, and what was I to do about it? Permit the man to retain what he had stolen? But that was not merely to render myself an accomplice in his theft, it was to do my part towards letting suspicion fall elsewhere, when the comtesse should become aware of her loss. Denounce the wretch? But that was to

destroy him for ever, when this theft might be but the wandering of a brain unsettled by fever and anemia! Should I go to him, address myself directly to his conscience, or, if not that, to his fears, and say to him: "I saw what you did. Restore what you have taken, or I denounce you"? No doubt that was the safest way, the most humane, the most just. But what if he should dispute the matter with feigned indignation? If he should boldly deny his own act? Should I have the courage to cause his arrest? I passed a miserable quarter of an hour in this uncertainty, and when I was ready to act upon the last of my three resolves, it had become too late. In my own mental tumult, I had not observed that the maid had already come, vainly, for the little green satchel; and, then, that she had returned to the deck and was beginning to search everywhere, moving coils of rope, lifting baskets, stooping here, stooping there, until at last the captain had noticed her and said to her:

"Did you lose anything?"

"Yes," the girl rejoined; "the purse of madame la comtesse, a purse of gold network, as large as that. There were two notes of a hundred francs and six napoleons. Madame la comtesse is very sure that she had it on the boat. She opened the purse to count the money and put it back in the satchel. She is very sure she put it back."

"Perhaps she did not close the bag perfectly," the

captain said. "At any rate, if the purse has fallen anywhere in the boat, you will find it. I am quite sure of my men. Nothing ever was lost or stolen on the *Pearl*, as true as my name is César Tournadre!"

And the worthy sailor began to search also. A few minutes later he had communicated the motive of his search to the cook, who had told it to the cabin-boy, who had told it to the sailors. The news had spread to the five or six passengers on board for Porquerolles, and the deck of the little steamer was full of bent backs, observant faces, rummaging arms; and Mégret-Fajac, who had come to stand near me, said to me, in the ill-tempered way which seemed perpetual with him where his wife was concerned:

"That's what it is to travel with women! They are always losing something."

While this improvised "Clear the deck!" was upsetting everything, I looked at the chasseur. None of the soldiers shared in the general agitation, but the manner in which this man isolated himself from the search contrasted too plainly with the attitude of the others, and, by itself, betrayed his act. The others watched, with almost childish passivity, the going and coming of those who were engaged in the search, and took an interest in what went on. They exchanged remarks. Their faces expressed a vague curiosity, almost amusement. The thief, on the contrary, seemed not even to notice what took place about him. His eyes looked away;

but a little more colour in his cheek, a gleam of anxiety in his eye, an arrogant tension of the whole face, the singular manner, especially, in which he smoked the pipe which he had just lighted, betrayed his mental anxiety. The feverish frequency of the puffs, the convulsed grasp of his fingers around the stem, were enough to betray him to a clear-sighted observer; and unfortunately, or fortunately, this observer stood there in the person most resolved, from professional pride, that the gold purse should be found, namely, the captain of the boat. I had already two or three times observed that the penetrating gaze of this sea-wolf rested with peculiar fixedness upon the group of soldiers. I had overheard, also, some remarks thrown at the group as he passed them: "You are not helping our search, soldiers? Did you see any person come near the bag? You know there'll be a good reward for the man that finds the purse. You are so rich that this doesn't tempt you?" I had received the impression that the alert sailor—himself a man of the people, commanding his vessel in linen overalls—despised the idleness of the four men, keeping aloof in gentlemanly indifference from the busy search the rest were making. I was mistaken. The subtle Provençal was studying his men, and I started with real terror, when I heard him call out, in his ringing voice:

"Come, soldiers, get up; and you, my lads," addressing his sailors, "we shall have to turn all pockets inside out, since the purse is not found. We'll begin

with myself, so that nobody shall be offended. *Té Marius!*" he called to the cook, "come here and search me!"

"The sergeant is lost," I thought, "unless he is quick enough to throw it overboard. But the captain watches him every instant. Ah! *mon Dieu!* And this is the moment when Mme. de Mégret must come on deck. What a shock for her to be present at the frightful scene when the purse is found in this fellow's pocket!" The elegant figure of the comtesse was at that moment visible in the doorway of the cabin. I could not but make a signal with my hand for her to stop, and going straight towards her, "Madame," I said, "I beg you not to come on deck. Every one is about to be searched, and the man who has stolen your purse will be arrested."

"I hoped it was only lost," she said quickly.

"It has been stolen," I rejoined in a low voice, "and by the chasseur with whom you were talking just now. I saw him, with my own eyes, take it from your satchel."

"The chasseur!" she said, "oh! the poor fellow!"

She had grown pale under the blow of what I had told her. Her eyelids quivered. An instant's hesitation passed over her delicate face. Her lips trembled slightly, so nervous was she; but a resolute will visibly arose in her.

"Will you do me the favour to call my maid?" she said, after an instant's agonized silence.

"You are not well?" I asked.

"I am perfectly well," she replied; "but quickly, quickly!" And looking at me with eyes that permitted no disobedience, she added, "Promise me that you will say to this man before he leaves the boat that I give him the purse, on condition that he will have a mass said for those who died out there. You promise? Ah! I thank you," she said, as I bent my head in token of assent. I still see the light which shone in her beautiful eyes; and I hear her voice as she called out to her maid, as soon as the woman came in sight after I had called her, "Thérèse, say to the captain the purse is found!"

"The purse is found!" repeated the woman. "How fortunate! And where was it?"

"Run, tell the captain," repeated Mme. de Mégret, without replying to the question; and, in the same tone and the same words with which she had spoken to me: "Go, and quickly, quickly! There must not be any one suspected."

IV

Do I need to add that I delivered faithfully the singular message which had been entrusted to me by the comtesse, and, also, that of us two, the sergeant and myself, it was not he who felt it most? The fellow made no answer at all, and I greatly fear that, in saving him from the military servitude to which his theft would

have condemned him, Mme. de Mégret was as unwise as she was generous. It was on the pier at Porquerolles that I spoke to him. The arrogant expression of his wasted face grew still more arrogant. He shrugged his shoulders with a gesture that said as plain as if his bitter mouth had made reply to the spontaneous, instinctive generosity of the comtesse, "What's all this nonsense?"

The thoroughly base nature has never meaner emotions than in the presence of certain kindnesses. They seem cowardly, hypocritical, above all incomprehensible, and peculiarly and deeply irritating. His going away as he went, his *képi* pulled down over his brows, his *bissac* lifted to his shoulder with a brutal gesture, his profile insolent, his body more slouching, his leg more dragging, with an emphasized mien of the cad, the blackguard, showed that this could not have been his first offence; garrison life and then the colonial campaign had doubtless made of him, as they do make of such fellows when the reformatory effect does not take place, an actual highwayman. The captain, who watched him off the boat, expressed aloud what I felt, and what he said again proved to me his extraordinary clear-sightedness.

"To think so many good lads have been left out there in that cruel campaign, and hard-headed fellows like this beast come back alive! If that purse had not been found, I would have arrested him on his looks. But, since it was found —"

The blue eyes of the old sailor winked ironically.

He, also, shrugged his shoulders and began to sing, as he busied himself with his duties. He had a shrewd conjecture as to the truth; but what was that to him so long as the *Pearl* and its crew were free of all suspicion? That a beautiful woman should have a charitable whim like this of which he suspected his passenger, he probably considered very foolish, but natural. Could he, with all his southern perspicacity, suspect that which I myself, with facts more significant to guide me, only understood that night after talking with my host at Port Cros, the not very romantic Arthur de Baltine, the *gun-man*, as his friends call him, who seldom talks of anything except shooting and the cuisine?

We had dined, really, in a superior manner, in the kind of shooting-box of the last century, where he had established himself for the season. We had had rock-mullets, which are only to be found in these unfrequented coves of the Mediterranean—queens of the water, finer than woodcock; southern artichokes, very small and so tender that the heart seems to extend to the tip of the leaves; strawberries from the garden, in February! In short, a *chef-d'œuvre* of a rustic meal, still further improved by an appetite of twelve hours in the open air—five of them spent at sea. Mme. de Mégret had not come down to share in this modest but delicious banquet. Her husband had made her excuses of fatigue from the journey. But his extreme ill-humour, as he sat down at the table, left no doubt in my mind

that he suspected the episode of the purse. Probably he had asked for details, possibly to see the object. And probably, also, from a horror of lying to him, Mme. de Mégret had told him her pity, her fear of causing a condemnation, her irresistible and sudden resolution to save the thief. She evidently, however, had not felt at liberty to mention my name in connection with the affair. The comte would not have been so indifferent towards me as he was at this dinner, during which he ate, certainly, as if he had been shooting all day. He drank great bumpers of a certain red wine of Port Cros, which has a bouquet like that of the Papal Château-Neuf before that vintage was impaired by the vine disease. In short, when we left the table he was thoroughly "gay."

We all went out together — Mégret aforesaid, Baltine, the curé of the island who had dined with us, and myself — to enjoy the admirable Provençal night, all perfumed with a fragrance of roses, narcissus, and violets. We followed the path which leads to the bay, opposite the rock of Bagneau, through an exquisite valley, surrounded with high hills, and, so to speak, fleecy with olive-trees in the moonlight. Mégret-Fajac walked with the old priest. He was smoking one of his strong cigars. We saw him walking in front of us with his heavy step, and we heard his loud laugh. I can feel Arthur de Baltine's arm as he took mine, and said to me, indicating the comte :

"Isn't he a low beast? And he has been outrageous for some reason this evening to his charming wife. But the luck he has! He can drink like a templar, and tomorrow morning do you think his gun will shake? Not in the least. He treats the comtesse like a brute, and if any one tried to console her, how that man would be picked up!"

"Then she has never been talked about?" I asked, and, in spite of myself, the idea I had had for a minute recurred to me.

"She!" he replied. "Never! And yet, to my knowledge, men have been madly in love with her; that poor Tilly, among others; you did not know him, Edgard de Tilly? But you have seen his name in the papers of late. He died of the fever in Madagascar, where he had asked to be sent, because of her."

"In what branch of the service?" I asked.

"He was lieutenant of chasseurs. An enchanting fellow, handsome, refined, brave as a sword, and chivalrous. She did not even look at him. And how he loved her!"

"But did she know it at all?" I inquired.

"Some people say she did; others say not," replied Baltine. "I have my little theory about it. I am convinced that Edgard declared himself one fine day, and that she simply, to say it plain, turned him out of doors, and that that was the reason of his departure for the war. You have to explain in some way his going out there." Then, with his good-natured irony,

he added, "There was only this one man capable of being in love as men used to be in the crusaders' time, and he must happen on a woman like that!"

The tone in which Baltine spoke these last words expressed the odd mixture of respect and regret inspired in him by the unquestionable virtue of Mme. de Mégret-Fajac. He was silent, and I did not reply to him, as I might have replied, what appeared to me to be so clear while he talked, and I remembered the various incidents of the voyage. I should have felt it a sacrilege to speak of the mysterious emotions I divined in that woman's heart, so pure and so devout. I looked at the heavy figure of that brute of a Mégret which filled the whole path. I remembered his irascibility of the morning, and again this evening; and I said to myself that a jealous man can sometimes see with marvellous clearness, unless, indeed, it were that, to satisfy her own conscience, and to put something irreparable between herself and the young man, the comtesse had confessed to her husband the declaration that had been made to her at the time that it was made. Then, in daring to save, as she had done, the soldier thief who had seen Edgard de Tilly die, what a proof of love had she herself given for the memory of this young man dead out there for love of her, and who would never, never know that she had loved him!

V

ODILE

11

11

11

11

11

V

ODILE

I

"Marquis d'Estinac et famille, Paris." This name, among fifty others on the hotel register at once transported me far from the vestibule of this hotel at which I had just arrived with the intention of spending the night. It was at the Maloja, a health resort in the Upper Engadine, less frequented in 1886 than now, but even then sufficiently well known for the fact of any Parisian tourists' stay there at that season—it was the month of August—to be in no way a cause of surprise. There was a very special reason why a chance meeting with M. d'Estinac would not be a matter of indifference to me. I had no suspicion, however, that to the first interest of curiosity would be at once added an interest of extreme pity, strong enough to make me give up my proposed departure on the following day, and change completely the plan of my journey. Condemned by the doctors, after being greatly overworked, to an

altitude and movement cure, I had just come up on foot through the beautiful Val Bregaglia. I was planning to go on to Samaden by Silvaplana and St. Moritz, and thence by the Bernina Pass to Tirano and Sondrio. I proposed then to visit the Val Malenco, arriving early in September at the Lake of Como and at Milan, where I had an engagement with the Italian novelist, Luigi Gualdo. I have long known the truth of the saying which declares that a journey planned and then given up will never be made in the future. And it is true, probably, that I shall never make the journey at that time planned. Ought I, however, to regret it? And those views of mountains, lakes, and valleys with which I should have pleased my eyes, would they haunt my dreams as do the surroundings of that wild, solitary Maloja—the lonely lake of Sils, the white peak of La Margna, the unfinished Château Renesse, the hillsides covered with Alpine roses, and the melancholy Forno glacier—solitary landscapes, unpraised of guide-books? How present they remain to me, for ever blent in my memory with the most enigmatic and the most pathetic of dramas! I was present at this drama only by chance and only as a spectator, extremely inefficient, altogether outside of it. How many times the thought of it has given me a pang, as though it concerned the dearest and most intimately known of friends instead of just merely a girl of fourteen whom I had never

seen before my arrival in the Maloja, whose existence I scarcely conjectured; and to-day she holds her place among my most besetting and most regretted visions.

"*Marquis d'Estinac et famille*," I repeated to myself, as I took possession of my room in the hotel. "That is true. The late Marquise Odile had one or two children." The uncertainty in which I was as to this detail proves how very little I had associated with the lady whom, in my thoughts, I called by a name so intimate, "Marquise Odile," and still it was enough for this prospect of meeting her husband and talking to him about her to cause me emotion. My relations with the young woman had been of a character too strange ever to be forgotten. At the time when I had been presented to her, nearly four years before this visit to La Maloja, she was a person thirty years of age, tall, elegant, with a trifle of eccentricity in dress which betrayed a slight foreign influence. Her mother was, I believe, of Hungarian origin. Although very pretty, she had very little social success. I do not think I had ever heard her spoken of before I knew her personally. Without coquetry, she was also entirely destitute of that conversational talent so habitual to French women. I myself, after this introduction, had dined in company with her several times,—and once, seated beside her,—without suspecting how much conquered and concentrated feeling was expressed in that face, coldly beautiful and intentionally reserved, what con-

tinuous self-control was betrayed by that mouth which so rarely spoke; what melancholy was revealed by the fixedness of those blue eyes, and that gaze which seemed absent, gone one knew not whither! It is worth while to add that Mme. d'Estinac was one of those blondes without brilliancy of colouring, whose beauty readily seems insignificant through excess of soft daintiness. In short, our relations towards each other were most correctly ceremonious, when it happened to me to have with her one of those adventures—I seem obliged to use this word—which no longer permit to a woman and a man complete impersonality in the intercourse of society. I had met her at the house of a common friend, in the course of a visit; and, rising to take leave at the moment that she did, fancy my surprise at her asking me abruptly on the threshold, as I was making my bow:

“Are you going homewards? May I take you part of the way? I have my carriage here.”

“But, madame,” I replied, all the more astonished at her proposal because we had not exchanged two words in coming down stairs, “I am not going home, and I fear I might take you too much out of your way.”

“Ah!” she had said, with an expression of intensity entirely unfamiliar to me in her way of speaking, “you can surely give me half an hour of your time. Do not leave me, do not leave me!” she had repeated, in a

low voice and with an entreaty so plainly agonized that I was absolutely incapable of reply. I had not even taken account of the singular character of this situation until I was seated beside her in her coupé, and, as the footman asked her orders, she said to him these words, which rendered still more extraordinary this tête-à-tête drive across Paris:

“To Notre-Dame-des-Victoires!”

It is a long quarter of an hour between the rue de Berri, where we had met, and the old church. This entire quarter of an hour passed without Mme. d’Estinac saying a single word, without her even looking at me. She had drawn back into her corner as soon as the carriage began to move. There she remained, motionless, with eyes more fixed even than usual, and the impression suddenly came into my mind, almost the certainty, that she was not quite sane. An attack of partial insanity could alone explain her offer, really astounding, in a person of her rank and her demeanour, made to a man with whom she was so slightly acquainted. For the first time I remarked in the features of this pale and beautiful face a certain nervousness which had hitherto escaped my notice,—the quiver of the parted lips over the shut teeth, the quiver of the eyelids above the too brilliant eyes. Her clasped hands trembled in her muff. Her breath, a little hurried, seemed almost to fail her at each inhalation; and although it was the very end of winter, I was conscious

that she shivered in her clinging sealskin garment. I was very much embarrassed by her conduct, the sign of such mental disturbance. I knew so little about her life, that it was impossible for me to form even a conjecture as to her moral condition and her probable motives. What could I say to her? And so I, also, was silent. I have often since repeated to myself, as I recalled this extraordinary episode, that the old proverb as to the deceitfulness of appearances is sometimes strangely true. Any one who had seen through the window of the coupé Mme. d'Estinac and myself, thus seated together, would certainly have believed, if not in a *liaison*, at least in a *coquetterie* on her part, shamelessly paraded in public. And this coupé of a woman of society was bearing us along, without a word being spoken, to the portal of a church! When the carriage stopped in the place des Victoires, the marquise seemed to awaken from her interior hypnotism. "Will you wait for me a few minutes?" she said. And I remained alone in this little boudoir on wheels, lined with dark green morocco, all its small details betraying an existence absolutely frivolous and *mondaine*, from the little white slate with its list of visits and appointments at the milliner's or the dressmaker's to the new book, the last novel of one of the most vapid writers of the period, published but yesterday and already half read. Inattentively I turned the pages of this worthless book, asking myself what I should do if, really, the marquise

were insane, and if, on coming out from the church, she should give way to some new and more violent eccentricity. If she were not insane, what explanation would she give me of these acts, so unusual, and especially so incoherent; this invitation to accompany her, this sudden and entire silence, and the rest? All my suppositions were destined to be reduced to nothingness by the manner, at once simple and noble, in which she put an end to a freak as innocent as it was extraordinary.

When she reappeared on the threshold of the church, she was a different person. She had just prayed, ardently, humbly; two little gray flecks on her dark skirt at the height of the knee revealed that she had prostrated herself upon the very stone. She had in her eyes that kind of subdued peace which follows after an extreme of fervour. A little embarrassment had come over her, probably a sort of repentance for having committed this inexcusable impropriety. I had stepped from the carriage and gone forward to meet her. A faint colour came into her cheek as she said:

"I thank you, Monsieur, for going out of your way. Excuse me for having detained you a half-hour. I give you back your liberty. Home!" she said to the footman. She had entered her carriage. The servant closed the door. She bowed slightly to me, in token of good-by. The horses started, and I remained on the sidewalk, more puzzled, I think, than I had ever been in all my life before, or have ever been since.

II

When one knows of what consequence for a woman's honour, in this cruel, frivolous world of Paris, may be the least word repeated about her, one hesitates, not only in saying anything oneself, but even in asking a question. Yet the strangeness of this adventure had struck me too forcibly for me not to make an effort to have it explained. I came to the decision to go to the person at whose house we had met and tell her the story just as it was. I perceived by the amazement depicted on the face of my auditor and by her reply, how entirely contrary was this boldness on the part of the young marquise to her usual conduct of irreproachable modesty.

"She must have felt too unhappy, and must have been afraid to be alone: that is the only explanation possible."

"Unhappy? But why?" I said.

"On account of her husband," was the answer given after a little hesitation; "at least, if what they say is true. She has never spoken of it to me. But I know that she loves him; and people say that he is taken with a certain Mme. Justel, the wife of the great sugar refiner, a new person who has made her way into society within the last two or three years. You have never met her?"

"I think I have seen her at the opera," I replied; "a fine figure, a little too stout, very dark, with much colour, much shoulders, but common. And d'Estinac is said

to neglect his charming wife, so refined, so distinguished, for that creature? No, it is not possible!"

"I was afraid of it," my friend replied; "and after what you tell me, I am sure. Poor, poor Odile!"

Even had I not been the observer by trade that every literary man, voluntarily or involuntarily, is, I should still have concentrated upon Mme. d'Estinac and her husband all the energy of attention of which I was capable. But if the remarks of society upon the conduct of the marquis were true, I must admit that neither he nor his wife nor Mme. Justel had given currency to them by any imprudence of conduct. Chance would have it that, in the fortnight which followed this extraordinary visit to Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, I dined at a house with the three. Even notified as I was, I could not detect a sign of intimacy between M. d'Estinac and her whom social malice had already endowed with the sobriquet of "the handsome sugar-bowl." I only noticed that not for a moment at dinner, or during the evening that followed, did the young marquise lose that strangely wandering expression which she had had in the carriage; and I believed that I noticed two or three times, in the eyes of Mme. Justel watching her, a gleam so malicious that it was even cruel. Beyond all doubt there was between these two women that antipathy of race which would, in a rivalry in love, become savagely exasperated. Madame Justel, with her strong and sanguine temperament, her plebeian hands and feet, her coarse mouth, her large teeth,

gave the idea of a sort of animal not much removed from the peasant who must have been her father or her grandfather. All the distinction of a race refined even to impoverishment met, on the contrary, in Mme. d'Estinac, making of her an exquisite, almost too frail, flower of aristocracy. The marquis, himself, showed that type, so common in the noblesse of the present day, of the sportsman who has been formerly an officer, with that mixture of stiffness and suppleness, elegance and vivacity, which composes this personage. At thirty-five he was still a very handsome man, whose air, at once insolent and gay, recalled a figure of the *ancien régime* in a manner so striking that one would have guessed the *gentil-homme* ancestor, even without knowing his name, one of the most ancient of the Roussillons, by the way. I had known d'Estinac for some time without having especially remarked him, except for his martial bearing, and his jovial, lordly manner. These jovial faces are sometimes the most impenetrable of masks. Did this one conceal, behind his mocking smile, his hair *en brosse*, his artificially curled moustache and his jocose profile, the most superficial, the most commonplace frivolity, or was it consummate, supreme unscrupulousness, the immoral and sensual cynicism of a true son of the eighteenth century? I tried in vain to answer this question. The enigma offered the other day remained to me all the more unintelligible because, when I saluted Mme. d'Estinac, she appeared no longer to have, in my presence, that slight

embarrassment which had for a moment disturbed her, on the threshold of the church. It was as if she had forgotten completely our tête-à-tête in the coupé, and the almost suppliant tone in which she had begged me not to leave her. Such an attitude on her part was now equivalent to an order to myself to forget what I am obliged still to call, for lack of a better term, our common adventure. Was it an over-strong impulse of curiosity, did I yield to an unconscious feeling of pique, or was it pity called forth by her manifest uneasiness and the recollection of what had been said to me about the unhappiness of her married life? Whatever was the motive, certain it is that I disobeyed her mute command, and being alone with her for a moment during the evening I said to her:

"Madame, I hope that you have recovered from the condition in which I saw you the other day?"

"Entirely," she said, with a slight shiver of her delicate shoulders. At the same time, the strange, fixed look in her eyes again expressed that anguish which in the coupé, had made me fear that she was going mad. At least, I felt sure I read in them a profound grief, and I am certain that this time it was only pity which dictated my words, when I continued:

"One thing, however, madame, I desire to say to you: it is, how much I am touched by the proof of esteem you gave me in trusting yourself to me in a moment of distress. You were suffering, and you were right

in believing that I should respect, that I should compassionate that suffering, and if —”

“Who has told you that I was suffering?” she interrupted. Her blue eyes now expressed an almost wild irritation. “Yes; who told you that?” she insisted, her eyebrows contracted, her mouth severe. And then, to show me her desire to cut short this interview, she touched, nervously and suddenly, with her fan the arm of a lady who at the moment passed in front of us. “Dear,” she said, “I want to speak to you a moment,” and, turning towards me, “you will excuse me, monsieur?”

These two recollections would have doubtless left upon my mind only the impression of a woman nervous, ill-balanced, and very changeful, had they not assumed a tragic character in consequence of frightful news, unexpectedly learned: her sudden death, a few days after this interview, which had been not very adroit on my part, I confess, and not very gracious on hers.

I had no sooner read this news in the paper than an idea seized upon me, with no less suddenness, “She has killed herself.” I reread the few lines, evidently communicated by the family. They were to the effect that Mme. la Marquise d’Estinac had for a long time suffered from a disease of the heart, and that an embolism had caused her death. I sent out for other papers. They all, in the same terms, announced this

event, which, to the public, was only one "Personal" among many. To me it was the close of that domestic tragedy, in which the visit to Notre-Dame-des-Victoires was one of the last scenes. Her friend's remark, "She was afraid to be alone," threw light upon all the mysterious portions of her conduct in respect to myself. When she had asked me to go with her in her carriage, she was still struggling against the temptation to suicide. She desired to go into a church, *into a certain church*, to overcome this temptation by force of prayer. To go alone, even no further than from the rue de Berri to Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, had been a terror to her, so feeble she felt herself before this temptation to suicide to which she was so soon to yield. She had taken me, there at the door, as she would have taken the first man she met in the street, merely that some one should be with her, so that she could control herself for a quarter of an hour longer. Her prayers in the church had saved her for that day. And then another day came, another hour, and the temptation conquered — conquered the instinct of life, conquered religion. This suicide, if it were true that she had taken her own life, explained too well her revolt against my pity that evening when I had seen her in the presence of her rival. Is it not an instinct, common to all thoroughbred creatures, to hide themselves when they suffer too much? How could I have failed to comprehend that silence was the only true charity towards

this woman? I ought not even to have seemed to think that she had a secret. All these ideas stirred me so profoundly that I could not remain in the uncertainty in which I was left by the newspaper paragraph, classed — O irony! — under the heading, "Society News." A few hours later I was in the rue de Berri, at the house of the common friend whom I had before made my confidante. To my question thus put: "Mme. d'Estinac has killed herself, has she not?" the lady replied, with an eagerness that proved to me, notwithstanding her denial, how nearly alike we thought:

"Odile! What a dreadful idea; she, such a good mother, and so devout! No, I never shall think so, I will not."

"Are any details given?" I asked.

"I know but little," she rejoined; "enough to show that your horrible idea is incorrect, however. She was driving and paying visits all the afternoon. About five o'clock, she said to the footman, 'Home, and as quickly as possible. I am not well.' When he opened the carriage door, at her own house, she was dead."

"And was there nothing found in the carriage that could give any hint? Were the windows closed or open?"

"What an idea!" said my friend, with even greater eagerness than before. "You are not going to suppose that she took poison and threw the vial out of the window?"

"Why not, if she wished to conceal her suicide? You have not forgotten what you said to me the day when she made me go with her in her carriage? This is the idea that frightened her, that presented itself to her that day."

"Be silent," my friend said, "and never, never repeat to any one else what you have said to me! D'Estinac is unfortunate enough in having failed to appreciate that adorable woman, and in having made her last days so sad. If she had some heart disease, and her husband's devotion to that abominable Mme. Justel hastened her end, that is enough. But the other thing—oh! it would be too terrible a punishment! No, it is not so; it cannot be so!"

And I had known nothing more as to the death of Mme. d'Estinac. I had left the country soon after for a long journey in Spain and Morocco, and this journey had deprived me entirely of news from that region of Paris where the sudden death of the Marquise d'Estinac would naturally be a subject of remark. Returning, about the middle of July, everybody was out of town. Later, I had again sought to question the lady who had been her friend. But I had encountered a fixed determination to say no more about it, that was too positive to be opposed. And then years had passed. Other and longer absences had made me absolutely a stranger to whatever gossip concerning d'Estinac and his way of living might have been current in the drawing-rooms

of Paris; and now I found myself, by a chance of summer travel, under the same roof with this man, who knew, who could not but know, the true answer to the enigma, and *why* had perished, as she did, that beautiful woman whom I so clearly saw, so fair in the dark corner of her carriage, — the same carriage in which she had died, — a dainty figurine of Tanagra, so delicate, slender, silent, with eyes fixed and slightly wild! Do I need to say more to explain the memories and thoughts that stirred within me, the curiosity, the intense interest, the surprise, in reading this single line in the list of visitors in the hotel office, *Marquis d'Estinac et famille, Paris?*

III

Every one knows what a mass of ill-cohering amalgamations is presented by the *table-d'hôte* of a cosmopolitan caravansery, like that one which outlines against this wild pass of the Maloja its huge façade, pierced by innumerable windows. I had at that time, and I still have, an ardent liking for these cosmopolitan crowds, much hated by certain anti-snobs, who are a little more foolish than the snob himself, as being more pedantic, more mediocre in their ways, and more aggressively vulgar. These immense modern hotels are a field for invaluable research to the traveller interested in the theory of races. Among the Alps, especially, and now that the doctors send all overworked people to a height of five thousand

feet, a dinner at the Maloja or at St. Moritz is as good as a course in comparative ethnology. How many times have I hypnotized myself, in one of these great refectories, where a hundred and fifty persons are taking supper in seven or eight languages, with calculating how much human history there is at the moment between those walls stuccoed to imitate marble and beneath these ceilings lighted by a complicated vegetation of electric flowers.

But as I went down into the dining-room that evening, at the first summons of the gong, I cared but little for the Anglo-Italian, Russo-American, Spanish-German, Franco-Norwegian mixture into which I was about to plunge. Among these innumerable faces, brown with the mountain sunburn, I sought but one, that of the tragic widower, for whom the Marquise Odile had, without doubt, killed herself. I imagined in him, in advance, one of those absolute changes which great trials inflict upon the most frivolous: his features once so gay, saddened; his whole face grown old, less with years than with grief. And so I was literally stupefied when I suddenly perceived the man whom I thus pictured to myself, on his way to a reserved table, still young, still slender, with the same gay impertinence of expression, the same smart, curling-iron twist to his blonde moustache, the same conceited look in his blue eyes. He was, besides, more than ever the *grand seigneur* of the eighteenth century, lacking only the *jabot*, the powder and

the embroidered coat, to be Richelieu, Lauzun, or Tilly; and, a circumstance which changed my stupefaction into actual disgust, he was accompanied—by whom? By her whom he ought never to have seen again if he retained the least respect for his wife's memory, Mme. Justel herself. This superb and plebeian creature, more material and animal of aspect than before, wore one of those too rich toilettes which are redolent of the *par-venue*; and all this vulgarity, all this bulk of coarse beauty was rendered more conspicuous by the presence at her side of a child, fourteen or fifteen years of age, whom I at once recognized as the daughter of the poor dead marquise. The most striking of resemblances,—and the most heart-breaking,—to one who suspected all, left no room for doubt. I saw walking before me the very phantom of her whom I had not forgotten: it was the same high-bred, delicate silhouette, thinner and more angular in this girl so very young, the same cold grace of features with more colour and with outlines less clearly cut, the same fair hair, and in the eyes, alas! that same singular fixedness of look which had, years before, in my strange tête-à-tête in a carriage with the mother, inflicted the impression of a slight mental aberration.

These three persons, whose entrance abolished for me the immense noisy crowd of the other diners, took their place at a small round table, where great flowers,—the fine carnations of the Engadine, as enormous as

those of Spain,—attested the deference of the landlord. This entire absence of concealment, the presence of the girl, the haughty and satisfied certitude with which the overdressed woman carried her head, helmeted with its massive black hair, the laughing familiarity with which the marquis spoke to her—all these signs united, suddenly made the situation clear to me. I perceived the secretary of the hotel who was superintending the service of the first course, and the sending out of the thirty waiters, napkin on arm and in their hands plates of some sort of *crème d'orge*, and I said to him :

"It is the Marquis d'Estinac, at the table there, is it not?" And, on his affirmative reply, "The lady with him, who is that?"

"Mme. la Marquise, the wife of M. le Marquis," replied the man, with the strong German accent which befitted the corporal-in-chief of a battalion of German servants in an international Kursaal.

"And that young girl?"

"Mlle. la Marquise d'Estinac, the daughter of M. le Marquis."

At another time I might have smiled at the astonishing distortion that the unpronounceable letters of this name received from a German mouth, and also at the visible respect with which this worshipper of the *von* multiplied the title in his reply. Now, I understood. He, in whom I was expecting to find a tragic, inconsolable widower, had remarried; and this second wife was the

person who had caused so much unhappiness to the Marquise Odile, if rumour spoke truly. I learned afterwards that the second marriage was of very recent date, and that it had taken place very quietly, out of respect for the widowhood, still very recent, of "the handsome sugar-bowl," who had brought to her second husband a fortune of three million dollars ! It was only very natural, very excusable even, considering the moral level of the period, that a great name should be bartered for a great fortune, I was conscious; and this traffic was justified even, to a certain degree, by the woman's beauty and the elegance of the man, really much taken with each other. At the moment, I felt only the cruelty of this union towards the memory of her who was no more; and the mystery of the sudden death, which ought, it would seem, to have been dispelled at the sight, grew darker to me than ever. Yes, I ought to have said to myself that d'Estinac would not have remarried, that he could not have made Mme. Justel his second wife, if the Marquise Odile had actually killed herself on account of this woman. There would have been in that an implacability too monstrous on the part of both. This argument, irrefutable when thus presented, did not even occur to my mind; and for the reason that, at the moment when I had just learned of the marriage, one glance at the group which they formed — she, he, and *the child of the other* — revealed to me that the tragedy of pain, begun years before between the Marquise Odile and her rival, continued between the

latter, herself now Marquise d'Estinac, and this young girl, who so much resembled her mother. And this commonplace situation at once appeared to me under a new aspect of mystery : beneath the motives of self-interest and of vanity, which would not have sufficed to explain the indecency, the sacrilege, rather, of this second marriage, contracted in spite of the manes of the wife dead by her own hand, I became aware of other motives—a whole moral drama of such suffering, such cruelty, that I should believe that I had imagined it but for the indisputable reality of the dénouement.

The father, the step-mother, and the daughter were seated around this hotel table, whose opulent carnations redeemed it from vulgarity, and were served by two waiters of their own. Of the marquis I saw only his shoulders and the head, a head incessantly in motion, on a supple and muscular neck. Mme. d'Estinac, whom I must now call by that name, and the young girl were visible to me in profile when they spoke to each other, and in three-quarters view when they addressed the marquis. When they spoke to each other? My first observation was exactly this: that the conversation was entirely between the marquis and his new wife. The child who sat between them had that absent attitude that I so well remembered; it had struck me so forcibly in her mother's case, on the day of our extraordinary drive to Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. The immobility of this face, as if it were

veiled, was the more striking because changes of expression, of look, of smile,—manifestations of life, indeed,—are so natural to a young person. Besides this, the pretty mouth was tight closed with a precocious bitterness, the cheeks were so pale that even the stimulating mountain air had brought no colour to them. The contrast between the father's merry mood and this sadness, between the stepmother's insolent splendour of health and this wasting of the vital forces, gave the motherless girl, in spite of the prosaic character of the scene and of the moment, the most pathetic and memorable aspect of a victim. A victim of what? First, of her father's selfishness—that true representative of the *gentilshommes* of the eighteenth century, sensual and frivolous like them, like them licentious and unfeeling, pleasure-loving and hard, one of those prodigals, graceful and brave, gay and showy, without the shadow of a scruple when it was a question of money or of pleasure. Even had I not known concerning him what I did know, or suspected what I did suspect, I should have divined how little he troubled himself about his daughter, at seeing how he dined jovially beside her, without paying any attention to her paleness and her evident melancholy, calling for two or three kinds of wine, tasting them with great appreciation, eating abundantly and of dishes prepared expressly for his table, and all his laughing and his talking! And he had that physical content, that joy

of blood and muscle, of the full stomach and the empty brain, which shows itself, one hardly knows in what, in the colouring of neck and ear, in the alert ease of the gesture, in an animal light of the eye, in the prosperous, metallic sound of the voice. How render in words that effluvium of happy and arrogant vitality which emanates from the entire personality! How render, also, what I so clearly discerned in the step-mother, a substratum of implacable, vulgar villainy; that concealed violence of a wicked feeling, exasperated to its cruellest intensity in a low nature; a plebeian energy preserved intact, notwithstanding luxury, title, habits of life; and this energy placed at the service of a frightful passion of injustice! Only for ten minutes had I been observing this woman, and twice I had caught her looking at her step-daughter with that same cruel gaze with which years before I had seen her fix her eyes upon the child's mother. There was everything in this look: there was jealousy, for this woman had for d'Estinac one of those monopolizing passions which, in these half-peasant organizations, have the blind force of instinct; there was envy, for the strong, robust creature felt herself vaguely and continuously humiliated by this exquisite flower of high lineage that the child was; there was still something further, that furious hostility of a despotic temperament in presence of an opposition reared against it, mute but unconquerable. All the complex elements of this singular sit-

uation I disentangle now in retrospective meditation. In that hotel dining-room, and during that dinner, I had merely the intuition—but so distinct, so indisputable that proofs since acquired have added nothing to the certainty of those first moments—that Mme. d'Estinac mortally hated her step-daughter.

What was the girl's feeling? Did she give back to her step-mother hate for hate? Was she jealous of the affection that her father felt for his new wife? To what extent did her mother's feelings stir in her young heart? I was able, on that evening of arrival, to reply in part to these questions. In part only, for this second Odile—she bore also this uncommon and poetic name—in all respects was like the first. She had already, young as she was, that startled aversion in the presence of pity, that displeasure at any glance cast at the bleeding wounds of her inmost nature, even were it solely in the hope of assuaging their pain. Oh! the precocious and lovable child—when I think of her now, after the passage of years, I feel within me as intense as then that compassion which she was no more willing to accept than her mother had been.

I seem to see her still, after that dinner at which she certainly had not spoken twenty words, seated in the marble vestibule where an Austrian orchestra was telling off its gay melodies while the crowd of travellers kept up their babel of chatter. I still feel her eyes, almost of a sea blue, resting on me as I saluted

her father and her step-mother; and when the latter had spoken to me of our Parisian acquaintances, with that familiarity characteristic of strongly vitalized persons which passes for good nature, the face of Odile at once expressed antipathy towards myself. And this childish antipathy I could not endure. I attempted at once to enter into conversation with her, but from her disdainful lips I could get monosyllables only until the moment when I spoke a name which suddenly transformed her. It happened in this way: d'Estinac, with his invariable courtesy, had begged me to sit with them to hear the music, and the more naturally since neither of us were smoking. The orchestra had begun with some classic things, but soon passed to dance music, and at the first notes of a Strauss waltz a few young women and young men stepped out from the group of auditors. A *sauterie* was organized.

"*Chère amie*," said the marquis to his wife, "do you dance this evening?"

"Why not?" she replied; and addressing me, "You will excuse me?" And she was off in her husband's arms, leaving me alone with Odile, of whom I asked in turn:

"Do you not dance, mademoiselle?"

"No, monsieur," she replied curtly, "thank you." For a few minutes we watched the swing of the couples, among whom d'Estinac and his wife were

without doubt the most noticeable. This creature with her vigorous beauty and this retired officer with his alert mien had in waltzing such perfectly blended motion, they gave so striking an impression of strength and of suppleness, they were so evidently lovers, that the vulgarity of the woman ceased to appear. The bacchante was visible behind the plebeian, and the empire that she wielded over the *gentilhomme* was only too well explained; too well also the jealousy that this creature without a soul must have inspired in d'Estinac's first wife—a being all soul, all sensitiveness, all refinement. The image of the martyred one came back to me, so present, so pathetic, that I suffered myself to speak of her to her daughter without the least consideration. Thinking of a person who is dead, towards whom certain survivors are too ungrateful, brings an imperative need sometimes of satisfying oneself that others have not forgotten.

"The first time I had the honour of being presented to madam, your mother," I said to the girl, "I remember it was at a ball."

"Mme. d'Estinac is not my mother," Odile replied, in a disdainful, almost an abrupt, voice.

"I am speaking of your own mother," I said, much stirred by her contempt. I saw her look at me with eyes from which the antipathy was vanishing; then, in another tone, timid, very soft, in which was veiled a question that she did not ask:

"You knew my mother?" she said, and her accent signified, "And you could talk with that person!" Then continuing her thought, after a moment's silence: "I, too, remember her going out to balls. She always came up in her evening-dress to say good-night and kiss me before she went. I often see her now, as she used to look."

"You could not believe," I continued, "how much you remind me of her. This evening, when you came in to dinner, I did not know you, but I recognized you."

"I know that I resemble her," she said. Then shaking her head, and with a smile, for the first time since I had seen her, she added, "But *she* was so beautiful, my mother!" Again serious, or rather gently sad, she continued: "My greatest regret is that I did not see her once more, after she was dead. She had been so well a few days before. She had sent me into the country to my grandmother's. I did not come back till after —"

She stopped speaking. Her eyes expressed her thought with an ardour so sad that I respected her silence. The detail which her innocent grief gave me cast new light upon this death about which I had thought so much. So often I had said to myself, as I thought of the Marquise Odile, "A mother, who killed herself!" I learned now that, morbidly attracted to the fatal path of suicide, she had sent away her child. Alas! why was she not held back by the fragile, charming little being, whose sensitiveness she ought to have been able to

measure by her own; she should have felt that she must not leave, alone in the world, defenceless, a soul so vulnerable. That the despair of the betrayed wife should stifle a mother's affection, the Marquise Odile must have loved this husband, who loved her so little. And the waltz continued, one of those Viennese waltzes where languor is drowned in sadness, and this music made a soft, pathetic accompaniment to the sensation of mortal pity that drowned my heart; and I saw my little neighbour's father bearing along, to the sensuous rhythm, the tall handsome creature who had taken the other's place. The second Madame d'Estinac wore that night a gown of orange-yellow *faïlle*, a very intense colour, which further increased the solid, so to speak, the opaque character of her beauty by deepening the tone of her complexion, her hair, her eyes, her entire colouring. D'Estinac, on his side, looked younger from the excitement of dancing; and his light eyes, his keen, sensual, arid face, gave the idea of a man who had never wept. I turned to the young girl and was about to begin talking with her again, when the intoxicating melody stopped, and d'Estinac and his wife came back to us.

"Those Austrian airs are delicious," he said, passing his perfumed handkerchief across his forehead. I recognized the aroma which floated around the dress of the marquise. "And you could not persuade Odile to dance?" he added, laughing; "that bad little girl is not nearly so young as her father."

"She puts on airs of a grown person," said the step-mother, shrugging her handsome shoulders. "She would very soon get over it, if I had my way." There was something so gratuitously aggressive in this observation that it seemed to annoy even d'Estinac himself, very probably because I was there. He made no answer to what his wife said, nor did Odile reply to it. But I have never seen a more haughty and disdainful look than that with which the little patrician measured the low-bred creature, under whose tyranny she was obliged to live. Anger came into the face of the impulsive woman, who, to chastise the insolence of the look, passed her arm through that of her husband and leaned tenderly against him. Then I saw the girl's eyelids droop over her eyes, as if to keep back the tears that were ready to start. An evil smile of triumph and defiance, of gratified anger and cruelty, curled the step-mother's lips. The orchestra began playing again, and Odile rose, saying: "I am a little tired. If you will permit me, I will go to bed."

"I permit you to go to bed," said Mme. d'Estinac; and, laying her hand on her husband's shoulder, "Shall we have another turn?" He had scarcely time to touch with his lips his daughter's hair; his wife drew him away, and in another moment they were again gliding in the waltz, as the slender figure of the young girl vanished through the doorway.

IV

This strange and painful scene, it will be comprehended, left me no longer capable of pursuing my route with the carelessness of yesterday. In remaining at the Maloja, I did not certainly hope to ameliorate at any point a fate which appeared to me so wretched. But an irresistible sympathy mastered me. Perhaps, also, I divined that the relations between this step-mother and this step-daughter had reached that last degree of tension which precedes catastrophes. I have often thought, since then, that this presentiment, obscure and unconscious with me, of an approaching crisis, had been a perfectly conscious one, in the mind of another person, and lucid even to premeditation. However improbable the supposition may be, possibly d'Estinac did not know that the Marquise Odile had killed herself. But the second Mme. d'Estinac, for her part, knew it perfectly well. Also she knew—the most illiterate persons have this knowledge at the present day—that suicide is an hereditary malady. I say this to myself; I remember, during that week, her constant abuse of the power she had over a child already predisposed to fixed ideas; and then, it seems to me that I was present at a murder, out of reach of the law, but as well defined as if the step-mother had made use of poison. And then I repulse this accusation as too hideous, and in the action and reaction of

these two natures upon each other I see nothing more than a contest over the affection of the father and husband, which takes place nine times out of ten in a second marriage, between the children of the first marriage and the new wife. Besides, how can one know when it is a question of beings so secretive in respect to their inmost thoughts as these two? The one, the step-mother, violent and unreflecting, scarcely understood herself. The other, the girl, had, like her own mother, that disposition to shut itself in, which is natural to a soul always hurt by its environment, that *noli me tangere* of the sensitive plant, closing itself against every hand, even one which seeks to caress it. I was destined to experience this too quickly.

During the day which followed this first evening, Odile did not come down stairs. D'Estinac and his wife breakfasted alone at their little table. The child's plate had been laid. Suddenly the marquise ordered this to be removed, as if to obliterate even this last modest trace that the girl lived and breathed, and might have been there. When I came up to bid them good morning, her face expressed the profound, absolute joy of the person who loves, and forgets everything except her love. She welcomed me with a full-blown smile of her red mouth with its broad white teeth, and a gayety in her black eyes — a smile which changed at once to the same cruel curl of the lips, a gayety which was at once obscured, when I inquired of d'Estinac about his daughter.

"Odile is not very well this morning. She had her breakfast upstairs with her governess," he said, with his habitual indifference — that of Louis XV. at the window, saluting the coffin of the Pompadour with that famous *mot*: "The poor marquise has very bad weather to-day for her journey!"

"She seems very delicate," I said, again addressing the father.

"She indulges herself far too much," interrupted the stepmother. "I always tell Raymond so. She has been too much petted, and is still."

Too much petted! The frightful irony of these words applied to the motherless girl makes me shudder even now, across eight years, and I see her again, the *too much petted child*, as she appeared to me the next time I saw her, twenty-four hours later, on the second day after the impromptu ball during which we had had that conversation, so little in harmony with the merry carelessness which, at least, should be the lot of that age.

It was one of those perfectly clear mornings when the air, laden with ozone, is, literally, at that height, intoxicating like champagne. The heat of the sun permeated the atmosphere, through which came vivifying breaths from the neighbouring glaciers. Against the blue, almost metallic in its clearness, peaks loaded with eternal snows were relieved in dazzling whiteness: the Corvatsch, the Morteratsch, the Bernina, the Roseg, the Margna — all very near. Close at hand, between the

larches and pines of the lower mountains which are the buttresses of these high peaks, the Lake of Sils lay extended, narrow and winding, as far as the eye could see; and this sheet of green water, scarcely ruffled by the wind, seemed like the head of a fjord, the upper end of some bay, which would open out wide in the distance. The garden of the hotel — if such a name can be applied to the fields of oats bordered with bushes of Alpine roses,— extended down to the edge of this sheet of water, so fascinating in its luminous freshness and repose. The vast landscape was enlivened only by the professional talk of some English men and women who were playing tennis. I was slowly going down towards the lake, so absorbed in the wild and imposing grace of the picture that I did not see, at the end of the path in which I was walking, Odile d'Estinac herself, seated on a fallen tree-trunk near the lake. She was looking, or seemed to be looking, at some fishermen in a triangular boat, who were hauling in a net. One saw the corks floating on the water, the dripping meshes emerge, then the black bottom of the net full of grass, and, writhing in the slime, the sharp-finned, speckled trout; they breathed the air with a convulsive motion of mouth and gills, then fell back lifeless in the boat beside the others. The young girl, her hands crossed over her meagre chest, the palms open, fastened upon the death-struggle of these poor creatures a look which gave me alarm. When she became aware of my presence, she started, like a person in

some forbidden occupation. A little colour came into her cheeks, always so pale. In her white serge dress, with her large white straw hat, whose shadow idealized, vapourized the upper part of her face, enwrapped in the clear light which the white silk of her umbrella scarcely lessened, she was a picture of innocence and suffering that I have never forgotten. And I said to her, affecting a tone of pleasantry which was not in my heart,

"You will take cold, mademoiselle, if you stay here on the edge of the water, and so you will be punished for looking at that cruel thing."

"That is true," she said, dropping her eyelids as she had done the other night, and speaking with a restrained nervousness; "it is cruel to fish. I was not thinking about it."

"And may I ask, then, what has kept you looking at those fishermen?"

"I was not looking at them," she said; "I was only looking at the water. Now that you have shown me what they are doing, I could not stay any longer. Poor little things! But how quickly they cease to suffer!"

She had risen as she said these words, uttered slowly, dreamily, and we had taken a few steps together along the path which borders the lake.

"You are better to-day?" I said; "M. d'Estinac told me that you had not been quite well."

"I am not very strong," she said, "and staying here among the high mountains is rather trying for me."

"The doctors recommended it for you, however?" I replied.

"Oh! the doctors!" she said, with a shrug of her fragile shoulders. "They recommend whatever is desired. But," she added, "I do not see Miss Fanny anywhere. She is my governess. She was to meet me here, to walk round the lake."

"Would you like to have me go to look for her?" I asked.

"No," she said eagerly; "stay here, she will come. Stay, stay."

As she begged, as a child might, that I would remain with her,—I, whom she did not know at all,—I imagined I saw her eyes turn towards the lake, whose water splashed gently at her feet, with a certain attraction and yet a certain terror. I remembered her mother, begging me to get into the carriage with her, that she might not be alone, and I shuddered at the thought that came to me. But no; this was but a dream, for the girl added instantly:

"I don't know why I should take your time. Go on with your walk. Miss Fanny cannot be long. Good-by."

"I am too happy that you permit me to accompany you," I said. "But I see Mme. d'Estinac is coming," and I added heedlessly, "if she scolds you for being too far away from the hotel, I will say that it was I who brought you here to see the fishing."

"I have no need of any excuse," she said proudly; "I was doing no harm."

"I know that," I rejoined, "but she seems to me very strict, and if I could spare you annoyance, now or later —"

"Mme. d'Estinac is extremely kind to me, and I have no annoyances," said Odile. The mimosa had shut all its leaves, never to open them again. This shy child had read too plainly a knowledge of her secret unhappiness in my looks, in the tones of my voice, in this awkward offer—I ought to have known how awkward it was. Long ago, had I not, with my frank commiseration, offended the mother? But of all silences, the silence of pity is the hardest to keep unbroken. And perhaps Odile might not have remained unforgiving towards this sympathetic, almost fraternal indiscretion, had not the step-mother, at that moment appearing in sight, given the lie cruelly and sarcastically to the girl's innocent words:

"Will you return to the house, and instantly, my dear Odile," called out Mme. d'Estinac, just entering the path; "you have been forbidden, often enough, to go out alone! Your father shall hear of this."

V

If I were to live a hundred years, I believe I should never forget that scene of injustice which I was obliged to witness without uttering a word—I do not mean of

protection, but of indignation. I see, as distinctly as if all this were not an affair of a dozen years ago, that garden of oats and Alpine roses, Mme. d'Estinac, standing, pointing out to Odile with her finger the hotel door, and the girl walking towards it, erect in her white gown, without a word, without a gesture betraying her revolt. And around us, the glorious morning was radiant as ever, the untrodden peaks notched the sky with their imperishable snows, and the larches and cedars swayed gently against the blue; the Sils See rippled its dark green water; the fishermen pulled up their nets, wherein palpitated the living trout; the Englishmen and Englishwomen still played tennis; and time moved on — time, henceforth so scantily to be measured out to that young creature. This scene stands out clear in my memory like a picture before my very eyes, and after that, what I remember is only a confused mass. The days that followed are vague, indistinct, sometimes disappear entirely from sight. I retain no precise incident of the week, spent entirely in hoping for another moment alone with the young girl, in which I might seek to win back her confidence, or at least to repair my foolish error. And each time I met her at the *table d'hôte* or in the hall, I was perfectly aware of her misery, with the same horrible sense of being unable to assist or even to pity her. And then my memory becomes clear again, and two scenes rise before me: the last two with the precision of the photographic snap-shot. I see myself returning from a

walk to the château Renesse, on an afternoon as radiant as that morning when the girl had said to me her little sentence about the trout in the fishermen's net, "*But how quickly they cease to suffer!*" I arrive at the enormous hotel. I perceive a group of excited people gathered around a guide who is telling a story with much gesticulation. I inquire of one of the group, indifferently, as an idler asking questions from curiosity:

"What is going on?"

And indifferently also, like one idler replying to another this man tells me:

"It's a young French girl, the daughter of the Marquis d'Estinac, who was on the Forno glacier with her parents. She lost her footing and fell into a crevasse."

I catch my breath. "What, then?" I ask.

"Then? She was killed by the fall."

And again I see myself—not ten years ago, but this very last winter—in the gaming-house of Monte Carlo, and at a table of *trente et quarante* a man is seated who plays and wins, a little older in face but as gay as ever, as glad to live and amuse himself; and, following his game with an air of being passionately interested in it and delighted with his luck, a woman stands behind his chair, handsome, with a beauty that has grown somewhat heavy, though it is still superb. And d'Estinac, for it is he, cares no more for the double tragedy he has lived through than for what the

weather was yesterday; and the Marquise d'Estinac, for it is she, is no more disturbed by remorse than if she had been to the second Odile, the little suicide of the glacier, the most devoted of mothers, and to the first, the tenderest of friends. Where have I read that poignant sentence upon which this happy couple make a cruel and never-to-be-forgotten commentary: "Is it possible that there exists, moving quietly about in the world, a strong, venomous life which feeds upon tender and gentle creatures?"

VI

LA PIA

VI

LA PIA

I

Who has ever travelled in Italy and not known one of those days of perfect beauty, when all circumstances seem to unite to raise the soul to its highest degree of happy emotion: the time of year, the weather, the light of the sky, the colouring of the landscape, the meeting with an unknown *chef d'œuvre*, the picturesque grace of the people? Elsewhere—in Egypt, in Algeria, in Andalusia, you will find an air as soft, as transparent, afternoons as luminous; in Morocco, more imposing landscapes; in Spain, in Greece, pictures, sculpture, architecture of equal splendour; in Provence, in Ireland, the common people as humorously familiar. In Italy alone you will have the total accord of all these impressions, and this gives at certain hours in Italy, an incomparable enchantment which can never be forgotten. How many of these hours have I enjoyed in the score of times that I have been beyond the Alps, far, very far from Paris and its intellectual trivialities; far from the

literary world and its gratuitous cruelties; far, very far from all this, and near the ideal—near the dead, who have bequeathed to us in their art that which was best of themselves; near the soul of our race, since here is the point of origin of the Latin spirit, of the common genius which in vain we deny in our fratricidal rivalries! In Tuscany, in the neighbourhood of Pisa, Florence, Siena, there are little places whose mere name on the map sets my heart beating. Near Siena especially. Beyle gave orders that on his tomb should be engraved, "Milanese." I am sometimes tempted to ask that there be written above that in which I shall lie, "Sienese." And this would be no infidelity towards my real country. So much French history, and of the heroic kind, remains mingled with the stones of that city where Montluc was in command, the city which alone remained faithful to us during that terrible sixteenth century, so favourable to treason in every form. "Stranger," it is written on one of her gates, "Siena opens to thee her heart." I can never read this inscription without being touched by it.

It is the detail of memories connected with two of my visits to this dear city that I desire to-day to render permanent. The first belongs as far back as the spring of 1885, and as I think of it I find that it abides in my thought as one of those radiant manifestations of beauty which I spoke of just now. That morning, one of the last in the month of March, I

had set out, following the recommendation of an English book, to visit a Franciscan monastery, far up the mountain behind Volterra. I was to see there a complete series of scenes of the "Passion," in coloured terra cotta, the most important work of that mysterious blind sculptor, Giovanni Gonnelli, known as *il Cieco di Gambassi*. I had been urgently dissuaded from the rather long and complicated expedition by my usual guide in this region, an old artist whose acquaintance I had made in the little municipal Museum of Siena. He was attached to it, — I am not very clear in what quality, — and for the last twenty years he had passed his time in one of the halls on the second floor in filling up with wax the little cracks in the panels painted *a tempora* by all the Bartolo di Maestro Fredis, the Taddeo di Bartolos, the Domenico di Bartolos, the Matteo di Giovanni di Bartolos, the Benvenuto di Giovannis, the Girolamo di Benvenutos. I lose my way, nowadays, among the names of these old masters. The cavaliere Amilcare Martini had, however, taught me to distinguish them — he, whose entire life was employed in repairing their Madonnas, with all the nicety with which a dentist fills the two front teeth of a princess royal. He was a man of fragile appearance who had long, silky hair, beginning to turn gray, and a white goatee; and his eyes, of a pale brown, gleamed in a thin face, all worn and faded. From having lived in the presence

of the extinct frescos and damaged triptychs of the fourteenth century, his being seemed to harmonize with these discolorations. He loved them so passionately — the painters of his native country. He watched over their surviving work with so religious a patience. And all that was not they seemed to him so barbaric.

"What are you going to do at San Sebastiano?" he had said to me. This was the name of the monastery. "There was only one good thing there, a 'Martyrdom of the Saint' by Giovanni di Paolo. The monks sold it to an Englishman at the time of the suppression."

"And the Ghirlandajo which remains? And the terra cottas?"

"Ghirlandajo!" he had said contemptuously, letting his glance range over the gold backgrounds of the paintings in his museum. "Peuh! He was a worthy artist, but of a very debased period. As for the terra cottas, they are of the seventeenth century. And then," he had added, "you could not reach San Sebastiano in a day."

"If I went by train to Castel Fiorentino, I should be there about ten. Reckon it: three hours' drive to go, the same to return, two hours between, to let the horses rest, to have breakfast, to see the monastery; and I am in time for the last train, which brings me back here about nine o'clock."

"To do that, the train must be punctual in leaving and arriving," this worshipper of the primitives had

replied philosophically, shaking his old head; "and you know yourself that trains are always late here. Always late, alas! that is the Italian destiny in these days."

I hear him now, after so many years, uttering, with a sigh and a smile, this phrase, in which there was irony and conviction, pride and disenchantment. *Il Destino Italiano!* I was destined to have a too indisputable commentary upon it no later than the following morning; for, having persisted, notwithstanding the absence of the panel of Giovanni di Paolo, in undertaking my journey, a delay on the short local line made me two hours late in arriving at Castel, and the first *vetturino* whom I hailed, immediately on leaving the train, replied to my inquiry:

"To go to San Sebastiano de Montajone? You want three hours and a half in going, making good time, and as much more in returning, with an hour's rest. That makes nine hours. And I shall have to harness the Moor, for the mare is good, but she is old, and I have to spare her — *chi non ha amore alle bestie non l'ha neanche ai cristiani.*"

The amiable Tuscan had repeated this amiable proverb, while caressing with the whip the poor white beast harnessed to his carriage, one of those two-wheeled vehicles which the people of the country call *baroccini*. The shafts, attached very high, seem to take aim at the animal's ears. The two persons, who are all that

the vehicle can accommodate on its one seat, are thrown backward at every sudden pull of the horse. To keep their balance, they must secure their feet in the network of stout rope that makes the bottom of the vehicle, and affords a place for packages. But, all the same, an admirable machine for rapid motion is this gay little cart, hard though it is, and it braves swamps and rocks, ascents and declivities. And then, when a *vetturino* is as merry as that one, and speaks the strong, musical Italian of that province, what a holiday to go in such fashion, among the olives and mulberry trees, the vines, and the evergreen oaks! The gesture of the man caressing his beast was so attractive; he looked so alert in his clothes of black and yellow check; his brown face expressed so much intelligence, that, obliged to abandon my expedition, I made the best of the situation. The Tuscans have a proverb for this kind of wisdom, but for what circumstance have they not one? *Chi non puo ber nell' oro, beva nel vetro*. "He who cannot drink from gold, must drink from glass."

"Nine hours? Well, then, I shall not go to San Sebastiano," I said. "I should not be back in time for the train. But is there not some shorter excursion I could make?"

"Excursion!" he exclaimed. "If you will get into the carriage, I can drive you to San Gimignano in an hour and a half with the mare, and what churches

there are there, and what frescos — *tutta roba del quattrocento!*”

“I know them already,” I said, amused by the tone in which he had uttered one of the two words that the humblest inhabitants of that artistic country have for ever on their lips. *Quattrocento*, that is praise. *Seicento*, the other word, that is disdain. They scatter these epithets broadcast, and with what assurance, what sincerity! The man reflected for a minute.

“Do you know San Spirito in Val d’Elsa?” he asked, and on my reply in the negative: “No? But that is the most beautiful church in Tuscany. I will take you there,” he said, picking up the reins. “Will you get in?” And on my reply that I had not had my noon-day meal: “Fortunately, we have here the best inn in the province,” he exclaimed; “a home table, you know, but first quality, and Chianti, the real thing! *Vera-mente, non c’è male!* I will take the opportunity to put in the Moor!”

The facility with which this clever individual alternated enthusiastic eulogy and the prudent *non c’è male*, “it’s not bad,” gave me a little distrust in regard to the unknown edifice which he proposed to reveal to me. But what matter! in default of a *chef d’œuvre* of architecture, I should have the Tuscan landscape. I should have the conversation of Antonio Bonciani — this was my tempter’s name. And, my repast being ended, which consisted of an omelette fried in oil, a bit of

broiled meat, which had to be soaked in lemon juice, and a glass of Chianti, so stinging that it appeared to have been peppered, I scrambled up to the seat of the *baroccino*. We roll briskly along, the Moor trotting—a nag worse looking than the mare, with lean flanks and a fleshless neck, but good legs that, down hill, go like the wind. To make it easier for the animal, Bonciani walks up the hills. He has lighted a long cigar, first withdrawing the straw, and we converse. Around us is the most idyllic of landscapes; here a valley where the brown ploughed fields await the maize and beans; further on, wheat and oats are coming up, green against the dark earth. Almost all the fields have trees in rows, and vines entwining their trunks. Men are pruning these vines, which are still leafless, and are securing them to the young elms with yellow withes of supple osier. Gnarled olive-trees, here and there, wave their silver-gray foliage in the sunshine. From the hilltops we see the distant forest, whence come the charcoal-burners who pass, their carts drawn by white oxen with enormous horns. They are on their way to Castel Fiorentino, to Empoli, to Florence, carrying bags of charcoal, which will be used in the shooting season to roast thrushes fed on the berries of the juniper. Large villages notch, with their church towers, the distant heights, and here and there, behind a screen of cypress-trees, a painted villa shows its light-coloured mass, with its adjacent farmhouse. And con-

tinually, at the foot of slopes, at the top of hills, where a valley curves, we see the slender ribbon of the Elsa, its pale green water wandering between two clayey banks. A light, vibrating sunshine, a youthful sunshine, intoxicating and gay, gives the enchantment of a fairy scene to these agricultural labours, this young growth, these teams of oxen, these trees, this forest, this little river; and I listen to Bonciani recounting to me the praises of his Tuscany — of our Tuscany!

"Ah!" he went on, "Italy is the garden of the world, and Tuscany is the garden of Italy. It is a pity there are rather too many taxes now. Formerly, everything was so cheap; for a *merenda*, which consisted of a pigeon, macaroni, bread, a salad, and a half bottle of Chianti, my father used to pay only a *paolo*, fifty-six centesimi of our money. Now, one has to earn a little more. But who cares! We are not round-shouldered in the Bonciani family. We are five brothers. The oldest one is a hatter. I am the second, a *vetturino*. The third is in America, in Brazil. He didn't get his money for the Chianti and oil that he exported thither, so he went out to see to the business himself. The fourth brother took the farm, and sends out wine and oil to the other. They do well, *fanno del bene*," he said. How can I translate these words, accompanied by a gesture of the fingers and a wink? How translate also the graceful figure of *the shoulders that are not round*, that is to say, that easily let the burden slip; and the

merenda, half-lunch, half-supper; and all the Italian utterance, punctuated with the hard *c* pronounced like the aspirated *h* of the French? "The fifth is in Rome; he has a place under government. All the family is scattered like that—*tutta la famiglia s'è ramata così!*" Then, pointing to a large hamlet far off on a hilltop, "Our father came from there, from Montajone. There were four brothers of them. *Per Bacco!* many a time they went to the Whitsun mass, when they were boys, at San Spirito in Val d'Elsa."

"The church belongs to that village then?" I asked.

"*Che, che!* If you said that to the archpriest, the worthy man would cry out with anger. He is as quick as fire, you know, for all his seventy years. But it is not the quick-tempered ones that are to be feared. It is the displeasure of people who never get angry that is dangerous. We say in Tuscany, 'Beware of the vinegar from sweet wine.' Do you understand? San Spirito in Val d'Elsa belongs to nobody but the Holy Father. The archpriest will explain it to you. He will explain everything. He is so proud of his church."

"Has he been long in charge?"

"At least forty years," said Bonciani. "I am thirty-eight, and I have known Dom Casalta all my life. When I was no taller than half of my whip, I used to see him go and come, begging money for his church. Thousands and thousands of *lire* he has spent in restoring it. When he took it, it was a ruin, and you shall

see. One would think it was all new. It was because he loved it, and it was so fine—the purest *quattrocento*!”

Never was the prodigious suppleness of this admiring word illustrated for me by a more marvellous example than on that occasion. From the picturesque chatter of this good fellow, for the last hour of our route, I had formed for myself a rather poor idea, both of the edifice and of the priest of San Spirito in Val d'Elsa. I imagined a building of some merit, violently “restored,” blazing new; and, presiding over it, some half-peasant ecclesiastic, a great drinker of Chianti, a great eater of Gorgonzola, a great beggar for his church, and extremely underbred. So it was a first and delicious surprise when, at a turn of the road, Bonciani indicated to me, with the tip of his whip, a façade rising suddenly two hundred yards from us, and I beheld the choicest gem of an old basilica, half-Roman, half-Gothic. It has happened to me to see, since then, in La Collegiata of San Quirico—also begun in the eighth century and finished in the thirteenth—this paradoxical caprice, so adorably ambiguous, with round arches in the porch and pointed arches in the belfry. This façade of stone of a reddish tone, as if burned and eaten by the sun, had many rows of columns, one above another, of singular slenderness. I remarked, on coming nearer, how skilfully this light effect was obtained—each column gathered into a bundle of four little colonnettes, carved in open work, and very delicate, tiny, adorned by a serpent which

made them look like twisted fringe. Animals in pairs formed the capitals, and other living creatures appeared in every direction; in the pediment two crocodiles devoured one another at the feet of a Madonna; at the entrance, lions and leopards, crouching, supported the pillars of the base. Against one side of the church leaned a house built of the same reddish stone. It was evidently the vicarage; for, at the approach of our vehicle, a figure appeared in the doorway, which caused my *vetturino* to exclaim:

"There is Dom Casalta himself! No one could say of him that his gray locks are the flowers of the tree of death. Isn't he active! And every year he seems to grow younger."

And it was quite true that the personage who welcomed us at this moment, standing at the side of the noble church, presented at first sight no sign of the advanced age mentioned by the voluble Bonciani. The archpriest was a man six feet tall, who was still supple and slender. A friendly smile lighted up his well-shaven face, where shone two eyes of the most limpid blue, and this smile revealed the very white teeth, which were evidently intact. He was bareheaded. The breeze, which had been so refreshing to us all that ideal afternoon, gently waved the silvery curls of his hair, which fell over the straight collar of his old-fashioned frock-coat. Knee breeches, and silk stockings which revealed the legs of an athlete, and shoes

with gilt buckles, moulding a foot slightly out of shape from gout, completed this costume which the old man wore with a very marked personal elegance. He must have been at thirty one of the handsomest men of a race abounding in instances of personal beauty. He was still magnificent in strength and in manner. With this, there was visible in him a native dignity, and that attractive grace for which the Italian language has the word *simpatico*.

"Good day, Tonino," he said to Bonciani, with the deep voice often possessed by persons of his age who retain the full vigour of their vitality. "It is a long time since you last came to pay your devotions at San Spirito. Where were you last Whitsunday? But much shall be forgiven you, since you bring us company. You are welcome, Signore. You come at an admirable time. It is the best hour of the day to see the façade on account of the light. There, two steps behind the carriage! Two steps, just. That is the point."

Without his hat, although the sun at this late day in March was already very hot, the enthusiast had rushed out to the carriage. He had aided me to step down, and taking me by the arm had placed me at the proper spot. But who was I? Whence and why had I come? My knowledge or my ignorance of architecture? What cared he? I was a spectator of his vision. Did he see me? No; he only saw the church, *his* church! All his noble face was animated, was lighted

up with an enthusiastic and simple-minded joy. It was the ecstasy of the numismatologist over some perfect coin, of the archæologist contemplating an antique *stèle*, of the florist enraptured over a triple pink. Something in this lovable Dom Casalta ennobled, however, the insane eagerness of the collector. He was a priest, and the sanctuary where he had said his mass every day for forty years was not merely to him a fine edifice. His entire being, at that moment, was a living commentary on the Psalmist's words, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth." Then I became conscious that, with all his peasant shrewdness, Bonciani had neither been able himself to detect the true nature of this man nor to make me divine it. I had before me a very extraordinary case of enthusiasm,—the ardour of a priest who was at the same time a man of genius, for the building in which he was the officiating clergyman,—a very strange, very peculiar passion, of which there were instances by hundreds in the Middle Ages, and to which were due the foundation and the completion amid such formidable obstacles of so many magnificent edifices. At the close of this nineteenth century, ardours of this kind are more rare. So I listened, with keenly excited curiosity, to this vigorous and radiant old man, ingenuously opening his heart to me as doubtless he did to every stranger who came into his solitude.

"Look at that statue of the Madonna over the tympanum of the porch," he said, after he had pointed out to me the crocodiles and the leopards, one by one; "the one who holds the child off, and throws herself back as she stands, like this. It is a masterpiece of the Pisan school, and I believe it was made by Niccolò himself, when he was at work on the pulpit of Siena. You notice the grand, severe features of the Virgin, and how sad she is at what she foresees, and how she respects the Saviour in the child. It was taken away from here once, signore, would you believe it, and sold. At last it landed in the museum of the Bargello in Florence. Fortunately, the man who had stolen it was a good Christian, notwithstanding the theft. On his death bed, twenty years after, he charged his son to come and tell me his crime, and to whom he had sold the Madonna. The theft was before my time, you understand. My poor predecessor, God rest his soul, cared but little for objects of art. Well, I go to the second-hand dealer in Lucca who had bought the Madonna from the peasant. He begins with denials; he could not remember, after so many years. He ends by insolence. He and I were alone in the shop. I take him by the arms and lift him off the ground, and show him the window. 'If you don't tell me the truth, you are a dead man.' Ah! I was strong in those days," he laughed merrily, and all his thirty-two white teeth showed. "I should not have done him any harm, of course; it was only a threat to frighten him. There's

no harm in a lie like that, in God's service, don't you think so? The rascal takes fright and confesses—the Madonna is in the Bargello. In the Bargello? How could it possibly be recovered? I take the train to Florence to see the Princess Margherita who is now our Queen. I had heard that she loved art. I go straight to the palace. I ask to see her. I am sent away; but after all sorts of difficulties I am admitted. I tell her my story, just as I have told it to you now. The princess laughs; and a week later the Madonna comes back. This time she is fastened to the stones, and thieves will not detach her, I promise you! I put on the mortar with my own hands."

He showed them proudly, those hands of the consecrated workman,—strong hands with long fingers and of a singular spirituality—notwithstanding the little rheumatic nodes at the joints. As he ceased speaking, and looked at the Pisan Virgin, resembling in her sad rusticity the weeders or shepherdesses of Millet, another person appeared at the house door—a girl quite young, twenty years old perhaps, frail and pretty, with a complexion of feverish pallor, and a mass of fine hair, ash-coloured, under a round hat of very delicate straw with a minute crown and broad, soft brim. She held in her hand another hat, the archpriest's own, and she called to him in a tone of submissive and affectionate reproach:

"Dom Casalta, the Signorina Bice sends me to tell

you that it is not prudent to be in the sun bareheaded. Take your hat quickly, quickly!"

"And did she make you leave your lace for that, my poor Pia? It was not worth while. We are going into the church, are we not, Signore?" he said, turning to me. "And since you are here," he continued, speaking to the girl, "will you bring us the key to the chapel?" And again he addressed me, "That is my little pupil," he said; "one of the children of the neighbourhood. You can see where her father lives over there, a hundred yards away, that house among the cypress-trees beyond the little chapel, where the monks had a temporary altar when there used to be a monastery here. There is only that little building left. Pia! It is a good name for her. She loves her San Spirito just as I do. And so intelligent! It was with her aid that I restored the altar that you are going to see. She has a great deal of merit, that child. There happened to her one of those misfortunes which are also very great dangers. A rich lady, a contessa, who has a place near Gambassi, the other side of those hills, noticed her—it was five years ago—and took her away. The child is so refined, so delicate! The lady, who had no children, proposed to adopt her. For three years Pia lived *da contessina*," (how translate this Italianism?) "and then the contessa died suddenly. *A morte improvvisa, libera nos, Domini!*" He crossed himself. "She had made no will. The heirs, who were jealous

of the poor child, sent her home without a *soldo*. Her parents are very good people, but she had become a lady. Finally, God had pity upon her, because He saw that she loved San Spirito. She has been allowed to spend her whole time with me, in caring for the church, and now she is more than resigned. She is happy. This is her real home, and she can say, too, in speaking of herself—*ecce ancilla Domini!*”

While he was thus talking, we had entered the little basilica. It was a structure with three naves, whose walls must once have been entirely covered with frescos, and some vague-coloured figures were still to be seen at one side of the door. The neglect of many centuries had destroyed this decoration, and now the long walls extended vacant and white. The painted glass of the windows had been replaced by panes of ground glass, through which filtered a gray, neutral light; but its soberness was well suited to this poor denuded temple, whose sole remaining splendour consisted of a row of marble columns, evidently the spoils of some pagan temple, and almost all different from each other in size, in style, and in material. The architect of the eighth century had utilized them, just as they were, only making them correspond in height. Most of them were porphyry; a few, granite; the rest, white marble or verd antique. No one of the capitals precisely resembled any other, though almost all betrayed their Roman origin: volutes, and oves, and Ionic beading mingled

with the Corinthian acanthus leaves. The altar, isolated in the semicircular apse, stood behind the two ambones. The mosaic of the colonnettes of its canopy, in the style of the Cosmati, also testified to the former magnificence of San Spirito in Val d'Elsa. Thus despoiled of the adornment of paintings, statues, bas-reliefs, chiselled metal and hangings which, in Italy, make each church a museum, this one appeared clad only in the beauty of its lines. The severe plan of the primitive basilica stood revealed, free from all surcharge. To bring it back to this sort of ideal *schema* had required the most patient and most intelligent labour. The archpriest had expended upon it forty years. And enjoying my admiration for what had been the work of his whole life, his poetry, his love, he continued his monologue:

"When I came here for the first time long ago, in 1845, appointed by chance, I wept with grief, *sì, Signore*, I wept, real tears, before the ruin that this beautiful thing was then. This wall on the left was cracked all the way down to the floor. It had to be entirely rebuilt. Now, even an earthquake would not shake it. All the joists up there have been renewed, every one of them. And the ambones—observe the careful finish of that figure of a peacock walking among the vines! Where do you think I found that stone, that some barbarian had torn from its place? Why? That is what I should like to know. It was a well-curb out in the

field! Look here, you can see the place worn by the two ropes in drawing up the bucket. Then these mosaics in the grooves of these pretty twisted colonnettes. Pia and myself restored these, one little cube after another. But here comes Pia herself, Signore, with the keys. You shall see the wonder of wonders, a vault that you might cover close with gold pieces and not equal its value."

The young girl, whose touching history had been outlined to me by the archpriest, just at that moment came towards us; but now her head was uncovered, an adorable head, rather long, whose Greek shape was apparent under the fair hair simply parted in the middle and lying smooth. She carried a key, whose shank was twice as thick as her fingers, rendered still more delicate by thread mitts of a brownish shade. This little vanity as to personal appearance, the extreme neatness of her simple dress of some green woollen material, with which contrasted a collarette and cuffs of lace, evidently her own work, the black braid sewn on the edge of her skirt, all revealed—in this child of poor farming people, who had had her experience of a life so different from the present life—a care not to derogate too far. But the modesty of her virginal face, the reserved look of her soft gray eyes, the somewhat shy grace of every motion, made one instantly understand that this naïve attempt at elegance was for herself alone. No slightest coquetry had guided her in these efforts. One

divined by her mere noiseless walk, her light and supple step, a creature of innate distinction. The coarse environment into which she was born would only too much have justified in her case a revolt against unjust fate. But no. A cheerful, religious serenity, on the contrary, emanated from her whole being. She was truly the little "handmaiden of the Lord," as Dom Casalta had called her, at once Martha and Mary: she who busies herself making all things ready in the house, and she who listens to the words of the Master. From the moment I saw her, the secret of this destiny was clear to me, as if a matter of evidence. By one of those fascinations which very sincere feelings exercise, the archpriest had inspired in this Pia—well named, as he had said—the passionate affection he himself gave to his church. To the great unknown artist that he was—this Tuscan of pure race—the restoration of San Spirito, this gem of architecture, had been a romance lived, a subjective poem, a long, imaginative ecstasy, carried on through forty years; and this romance continued in the old man's pupil, this poem had become that of the refined peasant girl, thrown back, after the dangerous petting of an adoptive mother, into the vulgarity of the parental cottage. This ecstasy of a cult, carried to the point of fervour, for a beautiful artistic thing of which one is the guardian, illuminated the eyes both of the girl and of the old man. I can see them still, those two faces, the archpriest's and his

acolyte's, lifted as soon as the door from the apse was opened, with the same idolatry, towards the marvel announced, "which you might cover with gold pieces and not equal its value." It was a vault entirely composed of coffers of terra cotta, each one executed on a different model, and with an originality of decoration that words cannot describe; corollas of imaginary flowers intertwined with impossible fruits; a foliage as of dreamland, mingled together in reliefs softened by the exquisite, shaded colouring. And Dom Casalta resumed:

"This is the *chef-d'œuvre* of Il Cieco. Do you know those lines of his, under the bust of his Elisabetta?

" '*Giovan, ch'è cieco, e Lisabetta amò,
La scolpi nell' idea che amor formò.*'

'Giovanni, who is blind, and who loved Elisabetta, has carved her according to the idea formed by love.' And these flowers, too, and this foliage, it was his great love for the things created by God which made him see them and carve them thus. Oh! these terra cottas! They gave us more trouble than the Cosmati mosaics of the altar. We had to go over them, one by one, Pia and I, and it took us sixteen months. At last, my eyes failed me, and she had to do it all. You should have seen her standing on the ladder there, thirty feet above the floor. At first it made her dizzy. But she conquered that, did you not, Pia?"

"It was God's work. I was not afraid," said the young girl, and coloured at being thus questioned in the presence of a stranger. There was in these words a depth of faith, the more touching because the smothered voice in which she uttered them indicated such a frightened timidity. How this frail young girl must have suffered from that fear whose existence she denied, working thus for hours and hours at her perilous task, so far above the ground, with empty space around her, above her, everywhere! I saw her look up at the vault, whose alarming height I was measuring in my thoughts. Her delicate eyelids quivered slightly, her breath grew short, as will happen when the memory of a past danger seizes us with retrospective emotion, and she smiled with proud gentleness at the thought of her own heroism, while Dom Casalta, with that power of thinking in images, which is innate in this race where even spirituality becomes vital and sensuous, commented on his pupil's words:

"It is true, we are clay, all of us, and God is the great potter. He breaks his vases only at his will. But," he continued, "I offer you a very poor hospitality! You shall see the church again, as much as you like, for I observe that you are a connoisseur. But first you must refresh yourself. You shall have wine from my garden." He laughed, with a little comic pride, as a child might do, when he said these words of ownership—*il mio orto*. "My garden," he continued, "is a trellis

against the vicarage; we gather the grapes, Pia and I, in the autumn, and it is she who makes this wine for me. Oh! there is not much. Tuscans though we are, we are not of those who say, 'Wine is to drink, and let water turn the mill.' But a glass of San Spirito wine makes one young all day, and the church is so cool that you must have something to warm you. In summer Pia and I have delightful hours here. The air inside here is never warmer than it is now, and in winter never cooler. Come! But first notice that effect of the two porphyry columns near the fonts. How pure the lines are! That is the pure Ionic capital. A German professor came here who thinks that San Spirito was originally a temple of Apollo. If that is so, Signore, our basilica is the oldest in the province."

The good man loved his church so fondly that he related this pagan origin with the same enthusiasm that he had just now manifested in praising to me the genius of Il Cieco. Meanwhile, we had reached a little door communicating directly with the vicarage. We went up a few well-worn steps, passed through a corridor, and were at once in a very lofty and very well lighted room, the archpriest's study. Everything in the room told of this devotion to San Spirito in Val d'Elsa, which had sustained and made enchanting an existence so humble in its surroundings, so romantic at its heart. The library was full of tall volumes, whose mere form revealed works concerning the fine arts.

An architect's table, on trestles, showed sketches and working drawings, with an arsenal of squares, rules, compasses, sticks of India ink, saucers, and brushes. On the walls were photographs and engravings representing plans, elevations, or details of basilicas contemporary with this one: the San Giorgio of Valpolicella, the Santa Teutaria of Verona, the San Salvatore of Brescia, the Santa Maria of Pavia, which was for a long time Santa Maria fuori la Porta; and in Rome, Santa Maria in Cosmedin, San Saba, San Clemente, Santa Prassede, and I don't know how many more. It may well be supposed that my poor literary man's information does not go far enough to recognize or even to know by name the various specimens of old Romanesque art scattered over the Italian soil. But I can still hear Dom Casalta naming to me, one after another, these venerable sanctuaries; and he added:

"All of these I have seen with my own eyes. You may believe what I say, I am perfectly impartial. Some are more splendid, more ornate, better preserved than San Spirito; but there is not one which gives an impression of purer beauty. And there is not one which has around it such a landscape." Through the grated window he pointed out to me the beautiful valley of the Elsa, where the shadows were now beginning to lengthen. A transparent and divinely pure light lay over the brown earth, the silvery olive-trees, the green water of the little river and the tall black

cypresses near the chapel which concealed the farm of Pia's father. This light emanated from the blue sky, like a caress, like a benediction. I turned towards the old man. All his noble figure was in harmony with that calm landscape before which he had passed so many hours. The girl entered, bringing in her hands a tray with two glasses and slices of that black cake which is called in Siena *panforte*. An aged woman followed her, whom I at once recognized by the resemblance as my host's sister, that Signorina Bice, whose name had been mentioned earlier. She carried the bottle of the precious wine. How old and feeble she looked! But she smiled upon the stranger with a friendly smile.

"This is my sister," the archpriest said to me. "She was eighty last St. Sylvester's day. It is a great age. Unfortunately she is deaf,—she, who enjoyed conversation so much! Well, in this world one must adapt oneself, or be angry, or despair. She adapts herself. She is one of God's angels, for patience. Without her, and if she had not kept house for me as she has done, I should never have been able to put into San Spirito all the money that I have. And it was merit in her, for I must confess she has never understood the beauty of this church. She has no knowledge of art, except in the case of music. She sang. Ah! if you had heard her sing the *Veni Sancte* on Whitsunday! Good! take the glass that she has filled

for you, or she will scold me for talking so much that I did not give you time to drink."

Donna Bice had uncorked the bottle with her trembling hand, and began pouring out its contents. Pia held out the tray to me; I took the glass, where quivered a topaz liquid—one of those wines of a kind which I had drunk, as a little boy, in Auvergne, in a pleasant old house in Combronde, made with grapes kept in the hay-loft, and hence called, in that region, straw-wine. What an association of ideas was awakened in me by this warm and rather sour beverage, tasted once more, so far away from the place where I had lived as a boy! I had not time to give myself up to it, for just as I was lifting the glass to my lips, I observed upon the writing-table of the archpriest an object which made me exclaim. It was only a little panel of painted wood, representing, evidently, a scene from the Book of Tobit. There were four figures: an angel was walking, clad as a knight, carrying in one hand a sword and in the other a bowl; a second angel followed, in a long robe, his right hand holding a box of medicines, and his left leading a young man, in the costume of a traveller, laden with a fish; a third angel closed the procession, bearing a lily. A dog was running along with them, the dog mentioned in the Bible who ran first, to give notice to the blind father. A landscape of ravines, such as one sees in this part of Tuscany, gave to these figures in brilliant colour a

tawny background, against which were relieved in full strength the intense blue, the deep red, the pale orange and the very soft green of the garments, and the gold of the halos and of the armour. Though I am not enough of an archæologist to recognize, at first glance, a basilica of the eighth or ninth century, I had at that time been long enough studying the Siennese masters in the Pinacoteca, under the guidance of Signor Amilcare, to recognize, on examination, in this adorable painting the work of an artist of that school. One detail enabled me to perceive almost immediately that the painter was either Francesco di Giorgio or else Neroccio: the ornamentation of the knee and arm pieces, in which were minute heads of cherubs chiselled in gold on the steel of the armour. This was a decoration habitual with these two painters for the armour of angels. Another thing made clear to me the original use of the panel: the four coats-of-arms painted at the bottom, with the date 1471.

"But," I said involuntarily, and without reflecting how unintelligible to my host would be the technical word belonging to so peculiar a bit of erudition, "this is the cover of a book of *biccherna*." Then, seeing his surprise, I added, "Yes, this little panel must have been made for a cover to an account-book of taxes or customs. These taxes were called, in Siena, by the name *biccherna*, and the men who examined the accounts of these taxes were called the *camerlinghi* of the

biccherna. These men were always great nobles, very rich, and it was their practice to have their annual account-books bound between two panels of this size and shape. The decoration of this cover was entrusted to the best artists of the time. This custom is one of the special things in the history of Siena. When you visit the Archives of that city, you will see books of *biccherna*, to the number of a hundred or a hundred and fifty, all that could be collected, decorated thus on their covers by Sano di Pietro, Matteo, Lorenzetti, Duccio, and so on. This panel is by an excellent master. Underneath you see the blazons of the *camerlinghi* of that year. I have seen many of these little pictures, and rarely one finer in tone, more ingenious in composition, or better preserved."

"You are quite sure about what you tell me, Signore?" said the archpriest, after a silence, during which he had carefully examined the mysterious painting. "Perfectly sure," I rejoined, "though quite accidentally, for I have only just now been studying this matter. Day before yesterday my friend Signor Martini, the conservator of the Museum, showed me this collection of tablets of *biccherna* in the Archives; and, explaining to me what I have just repeated to you, he deplored that the Museum was not rich enough to buy some of them, also."

"You say, then, that this is by Francesco di Giorgio, or else by Neroccio?"

"Without doubt."

"And they are great painters?"

"Very great," I replied.

"Will you repeat these names to me, so that I may write them down?" he said, and then, with an air of triumph: "Pia, you were right! But what an evident favour from on high! what a gift of Lo Spirito Santo!" He crossed himself and, with much simplicity in the midst of his enthusiasm, he continued: "Yes, Signore, we received this little panel as a part of the legacy of an old uncle who was a canon at San Gimignano. There were all sorts of things in the two boxes that were sent me—books, papers, old vestments, and five or six paintings, of which this was one. I thought of selling the whole to some travelling dealer. You know we needed money so much for the church. I did sell the rest; but this picture, no! Pia laid it apart, saying that it was by some person of note. I doubted. But you see. In a church like San Spirito in Val d'Elsa"—with what emphasis he pronounced the words!—"there ought to be only masterpieces. So I have never been willing to hang anything on the walls. Now since you assure me this is a fine thing—I had the idea that it might be, but I was timid. It is only architecture about which I have some knowledge. Great painters! Francesco di Giorgio, you say, or Neroccio? A book of *biccherna*? I must write that word down, also."

He did so; then taking the panel in his two hands, and holding it off at the proper distance for his farsighted eyes: "Yes, it is a Tobias," he said; "I hesitated on account of the three angels. In the Bible there is only one. That is no matter; a painter is not required to be a theologian. Without doubt it is Lo Spirito Santo who inspired my uncle to leave us this picture, and you, Signore, to come here. What a surprise! Let us see, Pia," he added, turning to the young girl, "where shall we put this picture? I am going to hang it immediately, in the presence of our guest, so that he may have the pleasure of seeing it in its place, since it is he who has discovered it."

"Have you not always said that we needed a painting in the Virgin's chapel?" replied the young girl.

"You are right," he replied, more triumphant than ever; then, suddenly, with an air of discouragement, "but the frame?"

"I can do it!" she exclaimed eagerly. "I can make one of wood, and cover it with something. May I do as I like?"

"*Ecce ancilla Domini!*" repeated the archpriest, solemnly and heartily, pointing to the girl and looking at me; then he took up his glass, which, in the excitement of so unexpected a find, he had set down, untasted, on the table, and obliging me to take mine again: "Let us not despise the humblest gifts of God," he said, "we, who are not as they," and, pointing to

the three angels on the book of *biccherna*, he repeated the verse which the Apocrypha puts in the mouth of the celestial guide of the youthful Tobias, "It appeared to you that I did eat and drink with you; but I did neither eat nor drink: ye saw a vision."

The sun, now low in the sky, shone full upon him while he lifted towards heaven — with a pious gratitude which was no longer even astonished, so deep and simple was his faith — the little glass of liquid amber. The soft sunlight placed an aureole of ashen blonde on the intelligent brow of the young girl; it illuminated the old wrinkled face of the sister; it threw a dust of light upon the delicious painting, exquisite as a miniature, of the great Sienese artist. I had the feeling that it was an hour of very rare charm, and, associating myself in thought with the fervour of the arch-priest and his pupil, so enraptured at having still another jewel with which to adorn their dear church, I repeated softly to myself those simple words which contain perhaps the highest expression of all wisdom, "Let us not despise the humblest gifts of God."

II

Days and days had passed since this visit to San Spirito in Val d'Elsa. I had continued to wander about the world, a prey to the insatiable curiosity which has led me from Ireland to Palestine, and from

Athens to the United States, through scenes and manners, sensations of ancient art and of new vitality, historic dreams and visions of a time to come, indefatigably, and perhaps uselessly. How many times, thus going from place to place, I had returned in thought to that nook in Tuscany where I had once been able to contemplate an existence so widely different from my own, a life wholly occupied in the same devout work, in the same corner of the same province. Yes, how many times—carried off on a train, leaning against the rail on a steamer, packing or unpacking my luggage in the bedroom of a hotel—had I evoked the beautiful and restful vision of Dom Casalta, celebrating mass in the dear church, all whose stones he had so loved. A beautiful work in which to share; natural scenery to which to become attached; and to have this beautiful work at the same time a religious work, this natural scenery the same in which our ancestors have lived and died, the sky and the soil of our race—is there in the world a fortune more admirable, more enviable? And when, with this, fate gives one a pure and tender feminine nature to share in one's activity, a Pia as a pupil in the Ideal, as the confidante and companion of one's devotion, what a poem made real! I used to say to myself, "At least, I have known one happy man," and I promised myself to return to San Spirito to ennoble my eyes and my soul by the sight of this happiness. But each time that I was in Italy, something had occurred preventing this pilgrim-

age — which I made at last, too late, like so many other returns, constantly postponed, which would have been very delightful, both to myself and to others. We know that the hours are numbered to man who is to die, and we act as if their store were inexhaustible, the occasion for ever renewable, our friends eternal!

It was again from Siena, and in the spring of 1896, that I at last undertook this second excursion to Dom Casalta's hermitage. I had permitted eleven years to fall over my first impression of San Spirito. But how could I believe that truly eleven years — more than one-tenth part of a century — had passed between these two visits, when I found everything at Siena exactly as I had left it? Nothing had stirred in that city of all motionless things, where each stone of each palace seems destined to remain identical, and impossible to disturb, in the same place until the day of judgment. And one would say that the people share in this perennial quality of the scene in which they move. The long hair and the chin-tuft of the patient Amilcare Martini had scarcely grown any whiter. His face of an indefatigable restorer of paintings had been scarcely creased with any new wrinkles. And I had found him in the same hall of the same Museum, seated before a Sano di Pietro, like all the other Sano di Pietros, restoring with the same industrious fingers the gold which had flecked off from the same halos around the same apostolic heads. When I asked him for news from San Spirito in Val d'Elsa and

its archpriest, the adorer of Sienese paintings had replied with the same lack of interest as formerly, in respect to all that was not his own Museum.

"That is true. After what you told me I went out to see the table of *biccherna* that Dom Casalta had. You were right. It was a work of Neroccio and in excellent preservation. He never would sell it to us. I had the archbishop write to him. He still refused. I know nothing further about him."

And so I was obliged to set out on my expedition without any knowledge as to the present condition of the basilica and its priest. This time I was not alone. I had for my companion on this little expedition an odd sort of fellow, a club acquaintance, whom I had met at Siena, and who was not really the man to take on such a visit. If in truth the word "scepticism," taken in its ordinary meaning, could ever be applied to any person, it certainly might be to this Parisian, forty years of age, whom up to this time I had imagined to myself everywhere else than in an eighth-century church! I had, in accepting his company for a visit to San Spirito, yielded to a most inexplicable weakness, of which I repented even before the departure of the train. But how could one help it—when a fellow-countryman of one's own age and one's own circle, whom one constantly meets at dinner in Paris, with whom one has just been talking at a *table d'hôte* in the involuntary cordiality of knowing the same people and doing

the same things—says to you, “Where are you going to-morrow?” And one does as I then did, stupidly gives the name of the place one proposes to visit, and allows oneself to descant upon its attractiveness, boast the beauty of the church one has discovered there—as I discovered San Spirito—and sketch, in two or three half-mocking, half-enthusiastic sentences, the figures of those who made one’s first visit so interesting; and the result is that, instead of going alone on an emotional pilgrimage, one drags after him all that Paris one was seeking to avoid, amid severe and lofty visions of art, of nature, and of religion?

In the present case, I had at least the excuse that Bernard de La Nauve—such was the name of the companion so clumsily accepted—is not really a person of entire mediocrity. If he has some of the worst faults of the great company of idle *viveurs* to which he belongs, Bernard differs from them by the superiority in certain gifts, and by his culture. Although not titled, he descends from a very old family, whose name occurs in l’Estoile. But to borrow the very words of that malicious chronicler of old days, *le jeu, l’amour et la piaffe* have left to this last of the La Nauves scarcely more than his name, and just enough income for his trustee to supply him semiannually with the money needed to pay his landlord, his tailor, and his valet-de-chambre. La Nauve, however, has not interrupted for a single day his existence as a fashionable bachelor,

which supposes an income averaging fifty thousand francs: he rides his own horse in the Bois mornings; he breakfasts and dines at fashionable restaurants; he is present at all "first nights" in his orchestra chair; he makes love and he gambles as expensively as he did in the days when he was conscientiously ruining himself after the usual manner. There are such, in Paris, men who prolong thus, amid incredible difficulties and with sometimes evil expedients, a style of living which has facility for its sole object. Often the methods that these semi-adventurers employ in order to maintain themselves are such as could not be avowed. Often, and this was the case with La Nauve, these so-called idlers pursue, amid their gayeties, some serious occupation, to which they devote themselves with an activity all the more patient and careful, the more it is concealed. Some of them are agents at the Bourse, and employ their mornings in the Bois and their evenings in society or at the theatre in keeping up acquaintances which have given or will give them in the afternoon some profitable brokerage. Others put at the service of some newspaper, French or foreign, their expensive social experience, which they coin into "Echoes," entirely faithful to facts, cruelly so at times; for the habit of anonymous jobs is not very salutary for the conscience. La Nauve himself was supposed to practise another method, which is not within reach of the vulgar impecunious:

this pleasing talker, with clear, soft blue eyes and circumspect smile and delicate features, is not only a man of pleasure, he is an artist, so far as a man can be who has never had professional training and never made any specialty of art. He is a musician, and I have heard him play with much grace and spirit. He is a bit of an author, and there has been given at the Cercle of the rue Boissy d'Anglais a *proverbe* of his composing, *Qui trop embrasse, very vivaciously done, ma foi!* He sings with a very true and very fresh voice, and I have seen extremely presentable pastels and aquarelles of his. With this he had, in the days of his luxury, an enthusiastic taste for fine furniture, rare faïences, ancient tapestries, choice pictures. When he was obliged to meet the expenses of his extravagant life with an income reduced by nine-tenths, he began with selling his *objets d'art*, one by one, not to dealers, but to friends. The bibelots thus sold were, some later day, replaced by others, to be again sold and again replaced. In short, the dilettante is now a kind of second-hand dealer in black coat and white waistcoat, who can recognize in almost any house where he is dining, here a clock, there a terra cotta, elsewhere a frame, elsewhere a piece of furniture, which came from his little entresol in the rue Marignan. At least, such is legend. And, if it be true, the traffic is carried on so lightly, with so adroit a touch, that there is no cause to take amiss in this clever personage a

buying and selling, after all more honest than many other kinds. La Nauve, in fact, is so good a judge as to all *objets d'art* that one might fancy an indiscretion on the part of some ancestress of his with some shrewd Dutch Jew. He sells his bibelots, all perfectly authentic, only to millionaires, setting up housekeeping in Paris — Russian and Polish *grands seigneurs*, potentates of petroleum or salted pork, recent arrivals from New York or San Francisco, magnates of Honduras or the Argentine Republic. He deceives no one, for he supplies really valuable things to really rich people who desire them. His commission, therefore, is very legitimately earned; and it is a fine trait in his nature, redeeming the dubious character of such a trade, that he is never *blasé* as to the objects in which he deals. He remains an enthusiastic amateur, enjoying what he sells before he sells it as if he had no idea of deriving profit. His hands touch, his eyes contemplate, with sincere adoration all the precious things which do but traverse his drawing-room. When the queen of spades or of hearts is not too cruel to him, I would wager that he refuses profitable sales that he may keep the longer some piece of furniture that pleases him, a weapon whose chiselling delights him, a material whose tint enchants him. I add that, in this strange life and in this jealous concealment of his real resources, he has developed in himself the suppleness of a diplomat. I shall perhaps finish by, if not justifying, at least ex-

plaining, the inconsiderateness which made him my companion in my return to San Spirito. Without doubt, a more energetic person would have made this pilgrimage alone. For once, this defence of my solitude would have been a mistake, and without the presence of this rather unscrupulous Parisian I should never have witnessed an episode which renders still dearer to me the vision of the old basilica, and especially of that Pia, *the well-named*, whom the fervent archpriest had made his little pupil and the heiress of his soul.

"If you will allow me," I had said to Bernard de La Nauve, when we reached the station of Castel Fiorentino, "I will look for the *vetturino* I employed ten years ago. He was a curious fellow, and would amuse you."

"And perhaps he would aid us to discover some old painting which is not too dear," he had replied. "Positively, in this Italy of to-day one finds nothing left! Where is the time when I bought in Florence for three hundred and fifty *lire* the front of a *cassone* of the best period! I owe to that purchase the fact that I was not posted at the Imperial, would you believe it? I had lost somewhere in the thirty thousands. I could not find any way of paying. Saki Mosé was beginning his collection. I let him have that *chef d'œuvre*," he sighed; "and he was the lucky one of the two."

We were just stepping from the train as he recited to

me this incident, so little in harmony with the soft landscape which lay around us, deliciously intact itself, and perfectly like the other part of my recollections—the part which knew neither Parisian clubs, nor the museums of lucky speculators, nor the tricks of gentlemen at bay. But if nothing had changed in the little city of Castel, — neither the outline of the hills, nor the aspect of the houses, nor the cluster of tall, black cypress-trees near the station, — it was not so with the group of the four *vetturini* standing near their vehicles and looking out for passengers. I could not see the slender, active Bonciani, and I inquired for him.

“Tonino?” one of the men said to me, “he has had trouble.”

“He no longer has his horses and his *baroccino*?”

“One fine day his mare died,” replied my interlocutor. “He bought another, and she fell and broke her leg. Then he lost a third, and his *baroccino* went all to pieces. Then the police took away his license. That was his fault, too. He married and his wife left him. He has had trouble. Then he became intemperate, and then —”

“But why did not his brother, the hatter, and his other brothers do something to help him?”

“They have all been unfortunate. When misfortune is in a family it is like that; ‘all winds are contrary to a shattered vessel.’ The hatter died of fever. The farmer went to America. The brother in Rome was

bad-hearted and would not hear any one mention Tonino."

"Well, where is he?"

"He is a *mezzano* [a middleman] at Empoli. He is doing a little better now. He understands about horses, and men ask his advice. It was he who helped me buy this horse. See here, just look at his feet; they are like iron."

And to induce us to employ him he lifted the animal's foot; and strong it was, evidently — the horse was one of those cross-breeds between Sardinian and Piedmontese. The man, also, seemed a solid fellow, who must have had some means in beginning his trade as a *vetturino*. He was neatly clothed, a heavy gold chain glittered against his velvet waistcoat, and his carriage was a victoria, lined with new cloth, gray, not to be harmed by dust. The wheels and body freshly varnished, the lantern nickel-plated, the dashboard of enamelled leather, a mat for the feet — what a contrast to Bonciani's *baroccino*! I had the explanation of this change later, in talking with the hotel keeper at Siena. A company had been formed at Florence, for which an English banking-house provided the money, for the purpose of furnishing with carriages, at a little higher rate perhaps, but more comfortable and having a fixed tariff, the little interesting cities in the provinces which serve as points of departure for excursions. A few monasteries in the neighbourhood, and especially San

Gimignano, had placed Castel Fiorentino among this number. Had I need of that information to make me regret, in the presence of this commonplace equipage and this somewhat arrogant coachman, the picturesque slackness of my former guide? At least, the horse had been selected by him, or I believed so, and so I proposed to my companion that we should employ the victoria.

"To San Spirito in Val d'Elsa," I said, as soon as we were seated.

"Evidently the church of your friend, Dom Casalta, is not very much frequented by travellers," said La Nauve, laughing at the surprise imprinted on the driver's surly face. The man made me repeat my order, and then he said:

"But there is nothing to see there, absolutely nothing. If the gentlemen would like to go to San Sebastiano, to San Gimignano?"

"No," I insisted; "to San Spirito in Val d'Elsa. And if you don't know the way, ask it."

The pride common to men of this occupation in every country, which makes it hateful to them to confess ignorance when it is a question of roads, rendered this man's countenance more surly than ever, and a comrade, who was a native of the region, spared him the humiliation of inquiring.

"San Spirito in Val d'Elsa?" this man said, "you know Montajone?" Then, with gestures of the hand

delineating the country, he began explaining the various intricacies of the way, and ended, turning to us, with a proverb: "Three things are hard to do, — to cook an egg, to make a dog's bed, and to teach a Florentine" — *Tre cose son difficile a fare, — cuocere un uovo, fare il letto ad un cane, e insegnare a un Fiorentino.*

The Florentine shrugged his shoulders, but he made no reply to this saying, invented by these alert mountaineers in regard to their capital city. Whether it be praise or an epigram, who can ever tell? We set off, amused by this proverb which couples the cooking of eggs and the bedding down of kennels, in such a droll way, with the intelligence of the fellow-townsmen of Machiavelli! I found a local savour in the adage which tempted me for the moment to think of changing vehicle and driver. But the other was quite too poor. By this reluctance to accept the less comfortable carriage, I might have recognized the fact that I was ten years older.

At last we were in motion, and at once the landscape became so graceful and so rustic, with its same freshly ploughed slopes, its same young elm-trees decapitated for the vines, its same forests in the distance, its same silvery olive-trees, its same charcoal-burners driving their great white oxen with immense horns, that I forgot the first mishaps and the negative reply, very natural after his first proof of ignorance, to my question whether he had ever heard of Dom Casalta.

"Decidedly, this idiot will not be able to show us any old work of art that we can bring away," La Nauve had said to me. And by an involuntary association of ideas, such as the most circumspect men will sometimes betray unawares, he asked: "Do you know Marsh, the American? No? Well, it is no loss. He is the man-dollar in all its horror. But the hôtel that he has built, in the avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne, is truly beautiful. I must take you to see it. He consulted me on two or three little matters, and others before me who were much better able to advise him than I. There are marvels in that house, especially in Italian painting. That surprises you, does it not?"

"Nothing surprises me, in Americans," I replied. "They are the feudal lords, the *magnifichi* of our time. It is quite natural they should inherit from the feudal lords of former times."

"Feudal lords!" rejoined La Nauve, with the visible contempt that a man who has many centuries of aristocracy in his blood feels when he thinks of the moneyed man, even with the intention of exploiting him; "they are huge children who take the things of the Old World for their toys. That is all there is to it. This man has a niece who gave him his taste for the fourteenth and fifteenth. He pays its price. But I really think," he added, after being again silent, as he looked far off over the country, "that he would spend all his millions before he would find anything here in a circuit of

twenty leagues. It is extraordinary, I repeat it to you, how this country has been scoured. Speaking of Marsh and of Americans —”

And he began relating to me, with much humour, an anecdote of the demi-monde—of a kind of which he has hundreds, all new, taken on the spot and from life. The heroine of this one was the witty and charming Gladys Harvey. Decidedly, nothing lacked to complete the contrast between my first expedition and the second. While La Nauve talked, I looked by turns at his handsome face, at once so keen and so worn, where lingered still a last trace of youth, and at the wild, lovely landscape. The name of Gladys Harvey recalled to me the stream of carriages along the Champs Élysées towards the Arc de Triomphe; and, two steps away, the green water of the Elsa glided between its clayey banks. I divined from Bernard’s tone how deeply the Parisian fête had bitten into the heart of this complex being, of whom nature had made the beginning of an author and a musician, and vice, a *mezzano* of another kind than Bonciani, but all the same a dealer in second-hand things, inured to the secret compromises with conscience involved in such a *gagne-luxe*. His inconsiderate reference to the hôtel Marsh told me as plain as words could speak that he had been sent over by the American millionaire to make some purchase from which he would derive a profitable commission. And how explain that with all this he had preserved enough



fineness — sensations sufficiently alive, for the semi-artist constantly to reappear in him under the intentionally cynical man of pleasure and the crafty trader? He had caused me, during this first part of our excursion, secretly to regret having taken him with me. All my annoyance disappeared, however, when we were in sight of San Spirito in Val d'Elsa, and when, at that first apparition of the basilica, he gave himself up to an enthusiasm in which I recognized my own lightning stroke of ten years before.

"But it is a gem!" he exclaimed. "A thing perfectly unique! Your friend, Dom Casalta, is a wise man, and a lucky one in having had this admirable jewel of stone to care for! A bibelot of this size and this finish is to the *objets d'art* that we can have what a fresco by Michelangelo or Rafaele is to a poor little easel picture—what that oak is to a bit of grass. That campanile, how graceful in its elegance! And those colonnettes, with those crocodiles and those leopards! And that Madonna!" And the same name came to his lips which had suggested itself to me when first I beheld this anonymous *chef d'œuvre* of Pisan sculpture, "She is like one of Millet's women!"

Such similarities of impression compensate for much friction. I have reached that point in life where one knows too well how reciprocally unintelligible human beings are to each other; and how many things one pardons to a companion who, from time to time, says

to you about a book, a picture, a country, a statue, precisely the words that you say to yourself.

"What a pity it would have been," I replied, "don't you think so, if there had not been here one of those great unknown artists that true *dilettanti* are, to save this marvel from falling into ruins! It surprises me that he could have heard us coming and not appear in sight."

The victoria stopped, as I said these words, before the façade, caressed by the same transparent, golden sunlight that I so well remembered. But the door of the vicarage remained shut, and when I had knocked repeatedly, and each time more and more urgently, it was not the grand, luminous face of Dom Casalta which appeared behind the grating of the window of the ground floor that was finally opened. It was a dark, brutish face that I saw above the black soutane. This priest, with cheek unshaven at two o'clock in the afternoon, with the spots thick upon his cassock, with his hard black eyes, was so unlike the other, that I understood at once the truth: for this man to be installed in the vicarage, it must needs have been that something had happened to my old friend. Meanwhile the priest called out to us with a rough, surly voice:

"What do you want, signori?" And when I had spoken the name of Dom Casalta: "Dom Casalta?" he replied, still more roughly, "he has been dead a year, Dom Casalta. I am here in his place."

"We should like to visit the church," my companion

said, as I remained silent, actually stupefied by news, after all, so in conformity with what I ought at least to have foreseen as possible. Dom Casalta was dead, and, doubtless, the Signorina Bice, and perhaps also Pia! Suddenly, the moment when I had seen these three gathered around the little panel, that tablet of *biccherna* representing the young Tobias, came back to me with a precision that hurt me. It was as if I had physically felt life pass; and that this sensation of a noble and peaceful home, for ever ended, should be the more bitter, I heard the new archpriest reply:

"I will send the maid to unlock the door for you. But, as to what there is to see in the church—"

What a contrast between this grumbling way of sending a servant to show us the basilica, and the grace of welcome which I remembered! What a contrast, also, between this contempt for the venerable building, and the fervent devotion of Pia's master! What a contrast, lastly, between that Pia herself and the frightful hag who came, after some minutes of delay, to open the door for us! This female savage in a red petticoat, her feet and hands enormous, with one swollen cheek tied up with a soiled handkerchief, redolent of garlic and grease, her eyes weak and squinting vaguely, seemed to have been selected expressly to make one regret the more the refined, beautiful young girl who formerly handled these same keys, opened these same grated doors, glided between these same columns.

And, although the interior of the basilica had not changed, already traces of neglect were manifest, announcing its future decadence. The floor was unswept. Cobwebs disgraced the capitals of the columns. Panes of glass in many windows had been broken by storms, without any one's taking pains to reset them, and in many places the whitewash of the walls was scrawled with pencil marks or scratched with a knife. And, lastly, — here, at least, with a very unexpected poetic effect, — swallows had penetrated into the building, through the broken panes of glass, and attached their nests to the joists of the ceilings. The noise of our entrance frightened them and, with their long, black wings and tawny breasts, they began flying about under the roof with a rapid and agitated flight, which brought a tremor like a vibration into the silence of the old church. These palpitating birds were three in number, thus beating the air in their distracted motion, and a momentary hallucination gave me the idea that they were souls returned, under this form, to visit the solitary basilica — souls of whom, if not of the archpriest, his sister, and the gentle acolyte? I was to learn immediately that one condition at least was lacking to this imagined metempsychosis: one of the three, concerning whose existence in the next life I had this vision, was yet alive — alas! to see the pious task in which she had formerly shared abandoned, the sanctuary of which she had been the priestess profaned, the devotion of her departed master disowned.

"Was Dom Casalta ill for some time?" I asked, while La Nauve went on expressing his delight over the general effect and over the details of this marvelous construction, here admiring the capital of a column, there the carving of an ambon, elsewhere, further on, the frieze of the tabernacle.

"I was not here," the old woman said. "I came with Dom Malvano, but I know that he had *una colpa secca*" (a sharp blow), this is the picturesque and sinister Italian phrase, "in the sacristy just after he had said mass."

"And his sister, Signorina Bice; do you know anything about her death?"

"No, I do not," replied the old woman; "but she is buried near him in a chapel which you must have passed, if you came from San Gimignano, close by the farm, at the side of the cypress-trees."

"We came from Castel," I replied. "And the young girl whom I saw here with them, when did she die?"

"Oh! you mean Pia?" said the woman, shrugging her shoulders. "She is alive. It is her father who owns that farm. She will be here in a moment. As soon as any stranger arrives, she comes over to see if it is one of Dom Casalta's old friends." Then, peevishly, "She used to make us a great deal of trouble at first. She thought she was really the mistress of San Spirito. But Dom Malvano put her out of doors, and she only comes when there is a visitor. She goes to mass at

Montajona. What did I tell you? There she is now."

I turned towards the door, at the angry gesture of the ill-tempered old witch, and I perceived the poor girl of whose misfortunes I had just been told. In any case I should have felt the most lively interest in meeting again the fair pupil of the great-souled and enthusiastic arch-priest. In the presence of the mysterious moral drama which she now represented to me, how could this simple curiosity have failed to change into extreme sympathy! What a grief for her must have been, first, the death of her protector; then, this intrusion of a priest indifferent to the beauty of the old basilica; lastly, her own banishment from this place, which had been the asylum of both her soul and her body on her return into the rude life to which she was born! I remembered too well what Dom Casalta had told me: her adoption by a rich lady, her life at Rome *da contessina*, then her return to the wretched farm. I looked at her with an attention that instantly became most distressing. To what a degree this fine nature had felt these cruel emotions, her wasted face told plainly enough — that thin, fevered face where once smiled the grace of her twenty years. Now it was a tragic masque, all moulded of sadness. She was entirely in black, with black ribbons on the broad-brimmed straw hat, like the one of other days. This mourning attire brought out still more clearly the pallor of her colouring and the fair hair — her last relic of youth. The material of her

simple frock was much worn, under her shawl. Evidently, since the departure of the archpriest, the poor girl was enduring, besides her grief, all the distress of an existence daily more and more restricted. Yet the neatness of the too humble toilette—the little black lace mitts whence emerged her thin fingers, her way of carrying herself, of wearing the half-worn shawl, of tying the long strings of her hat over the soft wide brim, giving it the form of an odd cap—all still betokened the creature too different from her environment, the half-lady that she still unconsciously remained.

These ten years had changed the pious child into a person already becoming elderly. And these same years had, without doubt, weighed also upon my head, for she looked at me without recognition, although my image must have been joined, for her, to an incident certainly memorable in the history of her dear church—the discovery of the tablet of *biccherna*, the little panel painted by Neroccio di Bartolommeo Landi, representing Tobias and the three angels. When, in a few words, I had recalled to her this incident, the colour came into her cheeks. Her brown eyes, in which burned the cruel flame of the fixed idea, grew wet with tears. Her whole nature seemed stirred and softened.

“Ah!” she said, “how glad *he* would be to see you! He expected your visit every spring; but you never came.”

To mention him for whom her heart held a regret,

so impassioned, so unappeasable, was physically too painful. The swallows which continued to fly about among the columns of the old church were not more untamed than was this tender heart. I could see its fluttering under the shabby corsage, so deep was the poor girl's emotion at meeting again some one who had been a witness of her happier days. I scarcely dared speak to her, lest I might touch the too painful wound. But, though the victim of the intensest emotion, this delicate Pia was a very simple nature, and she had the courage of her emotions—one of the admirable traits of the plebeian soul. It was she who spontaneously, sadly, began the story which I should never have asked of her. As I listened I remembered that, in my presence, the archpriest had uttered the heroic words of the brave prayer, *a morte improvvisa libera nos, Domine*, and I was glad to know that the mysterious Dispenser of our destinies had spared the old man, even in the overwhelming surprise of sudden death, that of which his devout soul stood most in dread—the entrance into eternity without the viaticum of the last hour.

"He was so well the day before," Pia said, "and he had been so happy! The archbishop of Siena had come to visit San Spirito and say mass at the high altar. About two o'clock, and just as he was going away with Monsignore, a messenger came to tell him that a wood-cutter, the other side of Gambassi, had fallen from a tree

and wanted him to bring him the Holy Sacrament. He went, just as he was, under the July sun. He administered to the poor man and then went to take leave of Monsignore. That night he did not sleep very well, but he got up in the morning to say mass, for he had promised to say a mass for the wood-cutter. I served him at the altar that morning as I used to do when the boy was not there. If you had heard him say it—that last mass! He was so grand, always, at the altar. He prayed as the Saints must have prayed. But I had never seen him feel it as he did that morning. I think his guardian angel must have let him know, by permission of the Holy Spirit, for whom he had done so much! But is it not remarkable that the day before he should have made his confession to the archbishop and received the sacrament from him? Then, after mass, he returns into the sacristy:

“‘I am a little fatigued,’ he says to me; ‘go call my sister.’ He sits down, resting his arm on the table where he had just placed the chalice. His head drops upon his arm. He had passed away without any further suffering. Donna Bice did not outlive him six days.”

“But why is not his tomb in the basilica?” I asked, touched more than I can say by this narrative, which made me, in thought, a witness of that grand human thing—a beautiful death completing a beautiful life, in perfect harmony.

“Oh, yes! It was shameful,” replied Pia, eagerly.

"But it seems the law did not allow it. We were able, however, to bury him in a chapel on the road from which you can see San Spirito, and, happily, it is very near our farm. This is a great consolation to me. When I go to pray there in the evening, I can hear the bell from the campanile. But it is not San Spirito, and he would have so much wished to be buried before the altar of the Madonna, the last one that he restored, the one where we put the painting. You have not yet seen that altar? Ah!" she added, sighing deeply, "they have already spoiled it, like the rest."

And with her glance she pointed out to me what I had not hitherto remarked—along the walls, formerly so severely white, were hung miserable lithographs, coloured in crude tints. And in the chapel to which Pia conducted me a statue of the Virgin in painted wood, at the side of the Sienese panel, attested the invasion of vulgar ecclesiastical rubbish into the pure and austere asylum of art. This was, however, only a simple lack of taste, not necessarily inconsistent, in the new clergyman, with sincere piety. I was to see later that this was not the fact, and that to the enthusiastic lover of beauty, as noble from his priestly virtues as from his high qualities of æsthetic intuition, a wretch had succeeded, worthless alike from his intellectual and from his moral poverty.

Meanwhile La Nauve had joined us. The impression, which for me had draped the basilica with mourning,

he could not share. He knew Dom Casalta only from my account, and in talking with a companion so different from oneself in certain respects, involuntarily the speech is a little false to the thought. In outlining to the Parisian *viveur* the figure of the priest of San Spirito, I had emphasized the picturesque traits of the model, without bringing out equally the mystic character of this personality and its sacerdotal poetry. To La Nauve the substitution of Dom Malvano for Dom Casalta was but an insignificant episode, and no comparison destroyed the pleasure which the old church caused him. It was with a smile upon his lips and a light in his eyes that he came towards us. When he perceived the panel which had made the cover for the book of *biccherna*, his connoisseur's delight became actual excitement. I, myself, had partly forgotten the sovereign beauty of this painting, which now appeared to me in its true character as a masterpiece. The three angels, the young Tobias and the dog walked on, in the tawny landscape, and the colours of the delicate faces, of the soft garments, of the splendid armour, were rendered more soft, more velvety, more tender by the glass which now protected the painting. Even if I had not known that the frame was devised by Pia, I should have guessed it by the work, so characteristically feminine and quaint. A border of a figured silk, red, with gleams of gold, doubtless cut from some old chasuble of Dom Casalta's, surrounded the panel. This

silk, stretched over a thick pasteboard or thin piece of wood, was itself surrounded by a moulding of wood covered with a dark velvet; and this moulding which kept the glass in place was nailed to a wider border of wood also covered with the crimson brocade, but having besides a narrow trimming of silver lace. The precious picture, sheltered in this reliquary of silk and glass, shone with a magical brilliancy which made La Nauve cry out, speaking loud, and entirely forgetting that he was in a church: "But what a magnificent thing! How brilliant the gold is! And those faces! And the ornaments of the armour! What brushes and what lenses those old masters used, to depict so exquisitely hair and halos, eyes and a mouth, all in this nothing of space! Do you know that is the motif of the Tobias that is in the Academy at Florence, which is attributed by turns to one of the Pollajuoli and to Botticelli? If I should see nothing else in Tuscany but this gem, it would be worth the journey. But it must be taken out of this absurd frame."

"Happily she doesn't understand you," I said, calling his attention to Pia. "The frame is her work, and she is so proud of it."

He no longer heard me, absorbed in a more minute examination of the panel. I took the opportunity to resume my conversation with Pia, questioning her as to her present life. She replied with sentences, at first evasive, then more definite, as she grew more con-

fidential with this hitherto unsuspected friend. And still she said nothing directly, but only reverted continually to her former life, her nostalgia all too plainly attesting her weariness of the present.

"We are not very rich," she said; "my father and my brothers would like to have me work on the farm. But I am not able. I am not strong enough. And with my lace, if I am industrious, I can earn my living. When *he* was alive, it was so different. He was so good to them. He was always giving them some little thing, and then they feared him too. And even now, if I have any trouble, I speak to them about him. Ah! if it were not for his tomb to take care of, I should go to the Claras at Empoli, who have often asked me to come. It is so painful sometimes for me, when I think—if he saw the church as it is now! But who would bring the flowers to him every morning that he used to love when he was alive—the cyclamens in summer and violets now?"

Instinctively, and as if, after having yielded to a need of seeing this profaned church, she yielded now to a need of escaping from it, she had moved on, all the time talking, towards the door. So we left the basilica, and went to sit down for a time on a bench placed against the wall of the vicarage. How many times she must,—in the beautiful summer evenings, in August, for instance, when the Assumption fires were lighted on all the hills, or in June, when the fireflies

lighted up the darkness with their flying flames,—yes, how many times she must have sat here with the arch-priest, and heard, in the presence of the stars, that man of God speak of the immortal hope, here beside the old basilica! No doubt these recollections began to oppress her, for she now became silent. And I, more and more disturbed by all the secret and singular poetry that I was conscious of in this creature who was herself so unconscious of it, became silent also. I gazed at the beautiful Tuscan landscape, and remembered all its lines, seen so long ago from the window just over our heads. How long did we remain thus, plunged in a melancholy that we both felt to be so much the same in both? I have no idea. I only know that suddenly Pia's head and mine were lifted, just at the same instant, with the same shock of surprise, and that we looked at each other with the same thought in the eyes of each, and a like beating of the heart suspended our breath. Two persons had entered the room where this window was, which had been left open—the room that had been Dom Casalta's study. Not thinking that they were overheard, the two continued a conversation which had evidently been going on for a few minutes, and of which we now lost not a single word.

“Reflect, signore,” said a voice, insinuating, attractive, tempting, the voice of La Nauve, “six hundred *lire*, money down—that is a sum!”

"Either eight hundred or nothing," the other voice replied, the voice of the archpriest, surly and resisting. "If I sell this Tobias, the only fine picture that I have in my church, at least I must make a good affair of it." He used the Italian augmentative, *un affarone*, and the ending, pronounced brutally, had in his mouth a tone of greediness.

"Let us divide the difference," La Nauve went on, "and say seven hundred."

"No," was the answer; "eight hundred *lire* or nothing."

"And if I leave you the frame," said La Nauve, "and if I agree to send you from Siena some picture just the size, that you can put into the frame?"

"In that case," said the other, "it shall be seven hundred and fifty; but not one *paolo* less."

"Agreed, at seven hundred and fifty," said La Nauve. "I have the notes here. I will count them out, while you make out the receipt."

That this chaffering between my companion and the wicked priest had for its object the table of *biccherna* we had not doubted for a moment, even before hearing the name Tobias mentioned. I saw my companion's delicate face, already so pale, grow paler still, a scared expression came into her eyes; and to myself, the sale of this exquisite picture, once the object of such lofty emotions, seemed a kind of sacrilege. It was worse than sacrilege, since the painting had belonged to Dom Casalta personally, and had been given by him to the basilica.

An irresistible desire to prevent this shameful bargain brought me to my feet; I said, in a low voice to Pia, "That sale shall never take place, I give you my word"; and I entered the house, without ringing or knocking, leaving her motionless on the stone bench, her ears strained to listen, her whole face hypnotized, so to speak, with horror. It was only as I crossed the threshold of the room that I recognized the absurdity of my act and my powerlessness to break off a bargain with which I was in no way concerned. The archpriest was seated at the table, writing the receipt, his rude peasant face but half roughed out. The refined features of La Nauve, as he drew the pink bank-notes from his pocket-book, expressed the guarded satisfaction of the collector who has laid hands on an unhopcd-for windfall, and, before I had so much as opened my mouth,

"Was it not a happy thought," he said to me in French, "to ask this old rascal if the Tobias was for sale?" Then, gayly, "If I could carry off the whole church he would sell it to me. For seven hundred and fifty *lire*—seven hundred and fifty!—I get the painting. And I was not very clever at the bargain. I let him see too plainly that I was eager for it."

"Don't do it, my dear fellow," I replied, also speaking French; and in a voice of entreaty I repeated, "don't do it!"

"But why not?" he asked, and he looked at me with the amazement of absolute lack of comprehension.

"Because," I said, "this old rascal, as you only too justly call him, has no right to sell you this painting, which is not his. I know this, myself, for I was the first to reveal its value to Dom Casalta. He bequeathed it to the church. Consequently, I tell you again, this man is selling you what does not belong to him."

"You are, perhaps, right," said La Nauve. He remained silent for a moment, then he shrugged his shoulders and said: "Bah! I shall buy the painting, nevertheless, and for a simple reason: if this fellow has decided in five minutes, at the first offer, to sell me this Neroccio for seven hundred and fifty francs to-day, me, whom he does not know, it is because he needs money. He will need it just as much to-morrow. Suppose I yield to your scruple. To-morrow some visitor—English, American, a Jew, a dealer from Siena or Pisa—comes this way, sees the panel, buys it, and carries it off. Since it is the certain fate of this table of *biccherna* to leave San Spirito, I would rather it should go to a certain entresol in the rue Marignan."

"Unless it go to the hôtel of a Marsh or a Saki Mosé, with a good brokerage."

It was the first time I had allowed myself a brutal allusion to the utilitarian reverse of La Nauve's diletanteism, which he so adroitly kept always out of sight. This insolent remark had no sooner escaped me than I saw him grow pale. He had the strength

to conquer his anger instantly, and reply in the calmest, but also the curtest, tone :

"And if it should be for Marsh's hôtel or Saki Mosé's, I do not know that any man has the right to prevent me from making what use I please of an object which is mine; and, from this moment, that panel is mine."

And as he said these words, in which I recognized a fixed determination, he laid the bank-notes on the table and took the receipt held out to him by the priest. His eyebrows contracted, his mouth hard, his eyes fixed on mine with a singular expression of defiance and wounded pride, he folded the paper in four and put it in his pocket-book. Then, buttoning his coat, he said, in Italian, to Dom Malvano,

"Now let us go and get the picture."

The two men left the room, and went down the passage which connects the vicarage with the basilica, the same by which we had gone—Dom Casalta, Pia, and myself—in that distant hour when we had carried the Tobias, at that time unframed, to its place in the chapel of the Madonna. The two men went to take it away from that consecrated chapel, where its dead owner had believed that he placed it to remain for ever. How could this atrocious deed be prevented now? In yielding to indignation and speaking to La Nauve as I had done, I had lost my sole means of action, my personal influence. How could I appease the despair with which

the poor girl would be overwhelmed on hearing of my failure? What was I going to say to her, and to what extreme might she not go, with no more success than myself, in trying to break off a bargain which concerned neither her nor me, except for motives recognized by no law? I was so confused by my failure that I hesitated in returning to her. And when at last I found myself outside the door, I saw that she was no longer there. I confess, to my shame, I experienced a sensation of sincere relief. It was better that she should not be present at what I considered a veritable theft. And I, after the words exchanged with La Nauve, could do nothing else than withdraw, and manifest my disapproval by abandoning my companion. I looked at my watch, and found I had time to reach Gambassi on foot, there take a carriage and return to Castel Fiorentino, and then to Siena by the last train. La Nauve would naturally take the one before the last. The vexation of travelling with him, with the picture between us, would be spared me. Something, however, held me to the spot as if I awaited a miraculous intervention to punish this sacrilege. Almost a quarter of an hour had passed since the priest and my companion had quitted the study. Perhaps, at the last moment, one of the two had changed his mind, for they did not reappear. I was about to learn the cause, very natural, but very disconcerting, of this delay. At last I saw the two

men come out of the church, accompanied by the repulsive old servant, who screamed and gesticulated:

"I tell you I was in the sacristy, Dom Malvano, the door was open. I should have heard everything. A thief could not have entered and gone out in the few minutes that I was there. If it is not a spirit who has taken away the picture, it certainly is not a living creature."

"It is a thief," La Nauve said harshly, looking fixedly at the servant, "a man—or perhaps a woman. But the picture is mine. I have paid for it, and I will have it, even if I have to go with my receipt and call the carabinieri."

"It will all be explained, signore," said the priest. "Calm yourself, and we will recover the picture. See, this gentleman was there," he added, perceiving me, "if any person came out of the church he must have seen it." His anxiety proved his twofold alarm: lest he might be obliged to restore the seven hundred and fifty *lire*, unjustly pocketed, and lest this illegal bargain might come to the knowledge of the police. Perhaps, also, the word "spirit" used by the servant had stirred, in his southern soul, the same substratum of superstition which had been stirred in me. Perhaps his bad conscience was making him dread some mysterious vengeance from heaven. Certain it is that on my answer in the negative, his anxiety grew still greater. He began again to argue with La Nauve,

who merely repeated, "I will have my picture," and looked at the woman. Finally, observing the *vetturino* who had brought us, and was now standing twenty yards away, at his horse's head, in the shadow of a group of oaks,

"You did not see any person, either, coming out of the church?" he asked.

"Only the girl in black, who was talking just now with one of the *signori*," in a tone of indifference, which contrasted curiously with the effect produced by this simple reply. For the servant had no sooner heard these words than she began to vociferate, her eyes more squinting than before, her fist shaking:

"The girl in black? Why, that is Pia. Yes, it is she, Dom Malvano, it is she! And I never thought of her. There is no other person steps so light that I didn't hear any sound. There is no one else that knows the church. It is she who has stolen the picture."

"It is impossible," I interrupted; but as I spoke these words, I knew at once that this carrying off of the panel by the poor girl was not only possible, but certain and evident. "I was with her all the time that you were in the vicarage," I said, turning to La Nauve, although he had avoided looking at me or speaking to me since the beginning of this scene. But I had noticed that, at the mention of Pia's name, he had made an involuntary gesture which indicated sur-

prise rather than displeasure. He made no reply to what I had said, and the rascally priest proceeded with his investigation.

"But during the time that you were in my house, signore," he said, "she was not with you. When did this girl in black go out?" he asked the *vetturino*. "And had she nothing in her hand?"

"I could not see very well," the man replied; "she ran very quickly. It seemed to me, however, as if she had a package under her shawl, about as large as this," and with his big hands he represented in the air a square object, just the size of the missing panel.

"It was the picture!" insisted the servant. "It was the picture! She had been hanging round it for a long time. I had noticed her. I think she would carry off the whole church, if she could. Just as I was telling you; she has come to believe that it all belongs to her."

"Where does this girl live?" La Nauve asked. His tone had no longer its harshness, and I could see that his face expressed, if not a slight remorse, at least a certain hesitation and scruple.

"At the farm beyond the cypress-trees, near the chapel," replied the archpriest. "I will go there, and in ten minutes I will bring back the picture."

"I will go with you," said La Nauve. He turned towards me. It was plain to me that he would like to speak, but his wounded pride forbade. I could see that he desired my presence at the examination, so I went

along, making a third, between the fields of young oats towards the screen of cypress-trees which hid the little farm and the chapel near by. I remember the foot-path was sunken between two slopes, and on the low banks wild violets abounded, whose perfume filled the air as we passed. This delicate fragrance of the flowers that Dom Casalta loved, the colours of the day so pure and so clear, the profound peace of the country, the basilica profiled at our left — everything in this short walk made a striking contrast to the emotion which I felt, and the scene of cruel inquiry that was about to occur. I could not entirely prevent it; but I reserved to myself, if it became necessary, to frighten the priest by my testimony, in declaring that the picture belonged, not to the church, but to the private estate of Dom Casalta. This would be enough to prevent Dom Malvano and La Nauve from having recourse to the police, in case the courageous Pia should persevere in concealing the precious panel. And it sufficed to look at her, as we entered the great hall at the farmhouse, to be sure that she would persevere. She was seated, still breathless with her hurried flight, before her lace frame. Her trembling fingers could not manage the bobbins, and this with her panting respiration was enough to betray her. Her mother was going about in the room occupied with domestic cares, a fat, dull Italian peasant woman with eyes too black under eyelids that looked as if they had been rubbed with charcoal. She was washing the plates

of the breakfast which had evidently been served on the great wooden table, where still stood a flask of wine and some dishes. Festoons of sausages garlanded one of the walls of this room, which served the family as kitchen, dining-room, and living-room. On seeing these three personages enter her poor abode, the priest in advance, the poor woman was so overcome with timidity that she began stammering:

"Gesù Maria! We have not even chairs enough for you to sit on. Pia, help me to clear this armchair."

"We have no occasion to sit, Signora Giulia," said Dom Malvano. "We have come for the picture."

"What picture?" asked the mother, with an astonishment that proved, at least, her complete innocence.

"The one that Pia has just stolen from San Spirito," the archpriest said.

"That Pia has just stolen!" repeated the mother. "Gesù Maria! But she has just come in, two minutes ago, and she had no picture, any more than I have now. Speak, Pia, tell Dom Malvano that you have not the picture that he seeks. We are honest people, signori. My daughter—to have stolen a picture! If my husband were here, Dom Malvano, you would not say such a thing as that! It is true, as people say, flies attack lean horses, and insults are offered to poor people."

"You have talked enough," interrupted the priest, brutally; "either your girl will return the picture she

has stolen and you both are concealing, or the carabineers shall be here within an hour."

"They may come," replied the girl, proudly. She had risen and come forward, and was now standing between her mother and the archpriest, her eyes fixed full upon the latter. "Yes, they may come and search the house through. They will find nothing. I have not the picture."

"You have not the picture?" repeated the questioner, whose face was frightful with anger. "Take care! We are no longer in the time of Dom Casalta!"

"That I know," rejoined the girl, her face white as the thread of her lace, with a brave serenity that gave her the very look of a martyr. "I have not the picture; that is all I have to say."

"And who has it, then?" said the priest. We had drawn nearer, La Nauve and I. He saw that we were about to interpose and this redoubled his fury. "Yes," he repeated; "who has it, then?"

"He to whom it belongs," she replied.

This mysterious utterance impressed me singularly, the girl had spoken with such profound certainty. Dom Malvano, on his part, did not seem to have noticed it; and La Nauve, meantime, fixed his eyes on the principal actress in this scene, with the keen glance of a man who struggles against his own emotion, who distrusts himself, and is very anxious not to be the dupe of a clever bit of acting. I felt that the time had come

for me to interpose, and I began speaking to the archpriest: first with some consideration, then, later, as I found him absolutely unscrupulous, with the strongest severity.

"No," I said to him; "I will not let you torture this innocent girl any longer. You see plainly that she is not lying, and that she has not the picture. You see also that her mother knows nothing at all about it. Let us go and at once. You can send to notify the police; but I warn you that if there is a trial I shall testify. I was at San Spirito in Val d'Elsa by chance ten years ago, when Dom Casalta first became aware of the value of this panel. I knew that it had been bequeathed to him by a relative, a canon of San Gimignano. It will be necessary to see the will of the deceased archpriest and determine to whom the picture belongs. Monsignore, the archbishop of Siena, will be greatly edified, no doubt, to learn what becomes of objects of art in the churches of his diocese."

"The picture belongs to San Spirito," replied Dom Malvano, "and I am the sole judge of what is to be done in the interests of the basilica."

How long would this discussion have been prolonged? Should I have succeeded in alarming this disreputable and brutal person, and saving Pia from further pursuit? A very unexpected event suddenly occurred, abruptly interrupting both this conversation and my efforts, in a manner so touching that I feel it yet, as I

remember the revelation of that moment, and think of the shelter in which the poor girl had concealed her pious theft. There was first an outcry in a woman's voice, "Dom Malvano, the picture has been found!" which came to us from among the cypress-trees, and made us start, — Pia with terror, the archpriest with delight, myself with pity; and my companion? Did I know what had been going on during this scene, in the soul of this complex La Nauve, this Parisian, *blasé*, yet so truly the artist; corrupt, yet with nerves so delicate, so sensitive? Almost immediately appeared on the threshold Dom Malvano's servant, her face beaded with sweat, so rapidly had she run. In one hand she held the panel.

"I asked the *vetturino* more questions. He soon showed me which way this Pia ran." She said *Piaccia*, to emphasize her contempt. "A boy saw her go into the chapel where Dom Casalta's tomb is. She was so quick that she did not close the grated door, and I went in. She had hidden the picture behind the little altar. Here it is. Ah, the thief!"

"Will you be silent?" interrupted La Nauve in an imperious tone. It was the first thing he said all this mortal quarter of an hour. I felt in his voice a thrill of indignant vexation, as, drawing from his pocket-book a ten-lire note, he put it into the hand of the amazed woman. "Will you be silent?" he repeated. "Here, this is for you because you have found my picture; give

it to me, and go away—do you understand?—and at once.”

He took the picture before the dismayed peasant could make any answer. “And you, Dom Malvano,” he added, with icy politeness, turning towards the priest, “I have only to thank you for all the trouble that you have taken. Good-by,” he said distinctly, while the other was trying to frame some form of invitation for us. “We have not the time. Good-by, and thank you. I will speak to this girl myself.”

Dom Malvano and his worthy servant had gone out, one with his seven hundred and fifty, the other with her ten *lire*, and we remained alone, in presence of the mother who was moaning: “Gesù Maria! Gesù Maria! Is it possible?” and of the girl who faced La Nauve unabashed, with a fine, proud look of defiance and aversion. The latter made a visible effort; then, abruptly, he said to me:

“You know Italian better than I do. Will you do me the favour to write what I dictate, translating it? But are there pen and ink here, and paper?” Then, when I had transmitted his request to the mother, who, literally terrorized, at once brought us writing materials, I sat down at the table, and said to my companion: “Dictate. I will translate as fast as you tell me.” And he began: “I, Bernard de la Nauve, resident at Paris, 20 rue de Marignan, declare that I have restored to Made-moiselle Pia—what is her family-name?” “Beltrami,”

the mother replied. "Beltrami," continued La Nauve, "a panel representing the young Tobias and the three angels, a painting sold to me by Dom Malvano, archpriest of San Spirito, for the sum of seven hundred and fifty *lire*, his receipt being subjoined." Then taking from me the pen: "Let me sign and date it. Is that correct?"

"La Nauve," I said eagerly, "will you shake hands with me, and accept my sincere apology for having spoken to you as I did?"

He looked at me. There was no question he had been very much hurt, for he hesitated. But he was at one of those moments when the high strings of our nature have been struck so strongly, that the whole being vibrates generously in sympathy, and he grasped my extended hand, saying with a smile, ironical yet emotional, in which I recognized my comrade of the boulevard:

"It is forgotten. But promise me you will not relate this story at the club. They would take me for a fool. And perhaps I am. But the girl will pray for me sometimes. That does no harm, and, besides, see her eyes, and how happy she is!" Finally, in a very serious tone, "You know, a man likes to prove to himself, now and then, that he is better than his life."



DOWNEY'S CHRISTMAS ANNUAL.

Now ready, Price 1s.



THE public demand in lighter literature at the present moment is almost entirely for well-illustrated short stories.

This demand is especially strong at the Christmas season.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE is designed to meet this demand, and to meet it more fully both in quality and quantity than has ever been done before.

In order to accomplish this the publishers have engaged only well-known authors to write for it, among them being **Miss BRADDON** (author of "Lady Audley's Secret") and the late **Mr. JAMES PAYN**, whose contribution to **THE CHRISTMAS TREE** has a peculiar, if melancholy, interest, being the last story he wrote before his death.

The artists are equally well-known, among them being **GORDON BROWNE** and **A. D. McCORMICK**.

"Each book is a page of a great work, which would be incomplete without that page."—George Sand.

ILLUSTRATED ENGLISH EDITION OF
"LA COMEDIE HUMAINE"
OF
HONORÉ DE BALZAC

The translation of this Superb Edition of the Works of Balzac—"the greatest master of romantic fiction"—has been accomplished by Miss KATHARINE PRESCOTT WORMELEY, who has in the final volume of the series given us the story of Balzac's life.

The Edition is in Forty Royal Octavo volumes, enriched with 280 Goupil-Gravures from pictures designed by leading French Artists. The illustrations are printed on vellum plate paper, and tinted Replicas of each of the plates on India paper are bound up with the volumes.

The books are printed from a new type on Dutch hand-made paper, with the water-mark "H de B" on each sheet, and are handsomely and strongly bound in polished buckram, with gilt top.

The whole Edition—which is limited to 250 numbered sets, only 90 of which are for sale in this country—is now ready for delivery.

The price of each volume is TWELVE SHILLINGS AND SIX-PENCE net.

THE WHOLE SET MAY BE OBTAINED AT ONCE BY A FIRST PAYMENT OF FIVE POUNDS, THE BALANCE TO BE PAYABLE IN FOUR QUARTERLY INSTALMENTS OF FIVE POUNDS EACH.

(3)

"Here is a new Edition of Lever which it is a positive pleasure to read and handle. The printing and get-up are superb."

Westminster Gazette.

THE NOVELS OF
CHARLES LEVER

The first Complete Uniform Illustrated Edition of
LEVER'S NOVELS.

An entirely New and Copyright Edition of Lever's Novels in thirty-seven Octavo volumes, with all the Original Etchings (printed from the Original Steel Plates) by "PHIZ" and GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

In addition to the large number of Etchings and Engravings by "Phiz" and George Cruikshank, several of the volumes are illustrated with Wood Engravings by "Phiz," Luke Fildes, R.A., M. E. Edwards, and other Artists, all of which are included in this Edition.

A few of the volumes were originally published without illustrations, and for these books arrangements have been made for a series of illustrations by Mr. Gordon Browne, son of Mr. Hablot K. Browne ("Phiz"), and other Artists.

The printing of the present Edition has been entrusted to Messrs. T. & A. CONSTABLE, of Edinburgh, who have had a new bold clear type specially cast for the work.

The volumes are printed on laid paper specially made for this Edition, and are exceedingly light to handle. The Books are bound in extra cloth gilt with gilt top.

The text has been carefully and thoroughly revised, and all Lever's interesting Prefaces have been restored. Each Novel is also supplied with bibliographical notes.

The price of each volume is TEN SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE net, and the books are sold in sets only.

The Edition is limited to 1000 sets, and the type of each volume is distributed after printing.

"Good to look at, beautifully printed, and exceedingly cheap."—Vanity Fair.

THE THORNTON EDITION.

THE NOVELS OF

THE SISTERS BRONTË

Edited by TEMPLE SCOTT.

Among the many collected editions of the works of English classical writers which have of late been accorded the special advantages of the more modern taste in book manufacture, it has seemed to the publishers that the works of the Sisters Brontë also deserved a similar recognition. The publishers, therefore, have much pleasure in stating that the Thornton Edition (named after the birthplace of Charlotte Brontë) has been designed with a view to give book readers and book-lovers a series of volumes which shall compare advantageously with the "Edinburgh" edition of Stevenson's works, and with the special series now being issued by them of the novels of Honoré de Balzac and Charles Lever. In every case the text has been carefully collated with that given in the first editions.

Every care has been taken to make the volumes a pleasure to read and a delight to possess. The printing is from entirely new type, specially obtained for these volumes by Messrs. Gilbert & Rivington. The paper is of excellent quality, and the binding at once tasteful and durable.

The issue of the series commenced in September 1898 with "Jane Eyre" (2 vols.), which contained a new Autogravure portrait of Charlotte Brontë. "Wuthering Heights" was published in October, to be followed by "Wildfell Hall" (2 vols.) in November, containing a portrait of Anne drawn by Charlotte.

The price of each volume is FIVE SHILLINGS net.

LE FANU'S NOVELS.

New Edition of the Novels of
Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu.

Each in crown 8vo, cloth gilt, with Title-page designed
by BRINSLEY LE FANU, 2s. 6d.

Guy Deverell.

Wylder's Hand.

Tenants of Malory.

All in the Dark.

Golden Friars.

Cock and Anchor.

Checkmate.

Rose and the Key.

Willing to Die.

Wyvern Mystery.

Torlogh O'Brien.

The Watcher.

The Poems of Sheridan Le Fanu. With an Introduction
by ALFRED PERCIVAL GRAVES. Foolscap 8vo, cloth
gilt, with a Portrait of LE FANU, 2s. 6d.

NEW BOOKS.

The Good Queen Charlotte. By PERCY FITZGERALD.
Demy 8vo, with a Portrait. *[In the Press.]*

Medicine of the Mind. Translated from the French
of MAURICE DE FLEURY by S. B. COLLINS, M.D.
[In the Press.]

The Actor and His Art. By STANLEY JONES.
[In the Press.]

Frank Fairlegh. By F. SMEDLEY. With 12 Illustrations in colours by E. G. FULLER.
[In the Press.]

Paved with Gold. By AUGUSTUS MAYHEW. With 26 pages of Etchings by JOHN LEECH, reprinted from the Original steel plates. Demy 8vo, 10s. 6d. net.

Christopher Tadpole. By ALBERT SMITH. With 26 pages of Etchings by JOHN LEECH, reprinted from the Original steel plates. With Biographical Sketch of Albert Smith by EDMUND YATES. Demy 8vo, 10s. 6d. net.

The Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O'Brien: A Story of the Wars of King James. By J. SHERIDAN LE FANU. With 22 pages of Etchings by PHIZ. Imp. 16mo. 7s. 6d.

** * Edition limited to 600 copies.*

The Yukon Territory. PART I.—The Narrative of the Expedition of 1866-8. By WM. H. DALL. PART II.—Narrative of an Exploration made in 1887 by G. M. Dawson. PART III.—Extracts from the Report of J. J. Ogilvie (1896-7). With General Introduction by F. Mortimer Trimmer, F.R.G.S. Super royal 8vo. With numerous Illustrations. 21s.

Mr. Verdant Green, an Oxford Freshman: the Adventures of. By CUTHBERT BEDE, B.A. (the Rev. Edward Bradley). The Further Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green, an Oxford Undergraduate. The whole in one volume, with numerous clever illustrations by the Author. New crown 8vo edition, cloth gilt, 2s. 6d.

NEW BOOKS—*continued.*

A Doctor's Idle Hours. By "SCALPEL."

A Cuban Expedition. By J. H. BLOOMFIELD. Imperial 16mo. New and cheaper edition, 2s. 6d.

The Great French Triumvirate. A Metrical Translation of "Tartuffe" and "The Misanthrope," by Molière, "Athalie," by Racine, and "Polyeucte," by Corneille. With an Introduction and Notes. By THOMAS CONSTABLE. 5s.

Prince Patrick. A Fairy Tale. By ARNOLD GRAVES. Illustrated by A. D. MCCORMICK. 2s. 6d.

Boz-Land: Dickens' Places and People. By PERCY FITZGERALD. With a Portrait of "Boz" by G. CRUICKSHANK. Crown 8vo. 6s.

Songs and Ballads of Young Ireland. With Portraits of Authors, and an Introduction and Biographical Notes by MARTIN MACDERMOTT. Fcap. 8vo. 2s. 6d.

King Stork and King Log: A Study of Modern Russia. By STEPNIAK. 2 vols. crown 8vo. 15s.

Hyde Park from Doomsday Book to Date. By JOHN ASHTON. With numerous Illustrations by the Author. Demy 8vo, gilt top. 12s. 6d.

A Jorum of "Punch": with Some Account of Those Who Brewed It. By ATHOL MAYHEW. Imp. 16mo, 5s.

What the Cards Tell. By MINETTA. Imp. 16mo. Printed in black and red. 2s. 6d.

NEW EDITIONS.

The Cockney Columbus. By D. CHRISTIE MURRAY, 2s. 6d.

My Theatrical and Musical Recollections. By EMILY SOLDENE, 2s. 6d.

Russia under the Tzars. By STEPNIAK. Crown 8vo, 2s. 6d.

Bohemian Life. A New Translation of Henri Murger's "La Vie de Bohème." Crown 8vo, 3s. 6d.

New & Uniform Edition of

Fitzgerald Molloy's Works.

Each in crown 8vo, cloth gilt, with Frontispiece, 5s.

The Most Gorgeous Lady Blessington.

The Life and Adventures of Edmund Kean.

Royalty Restored; or, London under Charles II.

Court Life below Stairs; or, London under the First Georges.

Court Life below Stairs; or, London under the Last Georges.

**The Life of Peg Woffington: With Pictures of the Period
in which she lived.**





THE CHRISTMAS TREE

STORIES

BY

J. J. J.

M.E. BRADDON

BARRY PAIN

CHRISTIE MURRAY

MRS. RIDDELL

TIGHE HOPKINS

S. Baring Gould

KATHARINE S MACQUOID

EMILY SOLDENE

F. FRANKFORT MOORE

GEORGE MANVILLE FENN

MORLEY ROBERTS

COLONEL NEWNHAM-DAVIS

JAMES PAYN

GORDON BROWNE

A.D.M.C.

SDELL

U
TH

TH

NEW FICTION—*continued.*

SHILLING NOVELS.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| The Amazing Judgment. | By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM. |
| My Sister Barbara. | By LADY POORE. |
| Twás in Droll Donegal. | By "MAC." |
| A Sensational Trance. | By FORBES DAWSON. |

A NEW SERIES OF POPULAR NOVELS.

Uniformly Bound in Stiff Wrappers, 1/6 ; Cloth Gilt, 2/-.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Constance. | By F. C. PHILIPS. |
| The Co-Respondent. | By G. W. APPLETON. |
| A Life's Mistake. | By Mrs. LOVETT-CAMERON. |
| Tales from the Terrace. | By W. B. GUINEE. |
| Golden Lads and Girls. | By H. A. HINKSON. |
| Scholar's Mate. | By VIOLET MAGEE. |
| A Philanthropist at Large. | By G. W. APPLETON. |
| A Fallen Star. | By CHARLES LOWE. |
| An Experiment in Respectability. | By JULIAN STERN. |

"Splendid Sixpennyworths."—BLACK AND WHITE.

DOWNEY'S SIXPENNY LIBRARY

OF

THE BEST NOVELS BY THE MOST POPULAR AUTHORS.

These books are printed from new and readable type on
good paper, crown 8vo size.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Esmond. | By W. M. THACKERAY. |
| Oliver Twist. | By CHARLES DICKENS. |
| The Antiquary. | By SIR WALTER SCOTT. |
| Basil. | By WILKIE COLLINS. |
| The O'Donoghue. | By CHARLES LEVER. |
| Jane Eyre. | By CHARLOTTE BRONTE. |
| Torlogh O'Brien. | By J. SHERIDAN LE FANU. |
| Contarini Fleming. | By B. DISRAELI. |
| Rory O'More. | By SAMUEL LOVER. |
| Ormond. | By MARIA EDGEWORTH. |
| Last Days of Pompeii. | By LORD LYTTON. |
| O'Donnel. | By LADY MORGAN. |
| Vicar of Wakefield. | By OLIVER GOLDSMITH. |
| Frankenstein. | By MRS. SHELLEY. |
| Midshipman Easy. | By CAPTAIN MARRYAT. |
| Fardorougha, the Miser. | By W. CARLETON. |
| The Epicurean. | By THOMAS MOORE. |
| Hajji Baba. | By J. MORIER. |
| The Collegians. | By GERALD GRIFFIN. |
| Christie Johnstone. | By CHARLES READE. |
| Digby Grand. | By G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE. |
| Arthur Gordon Pym, and
other Tales. | By EDGAR ALLAN POE. |
| The Scarlet Letter. | By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE. |
| The Scalp Hunters. | By MAYNE REID. |
| Handy Andy. | By SAMUEL LOVER. |
| Wuthering Heights. | By EMILY BRONTE. |
| Mr. Verdant Green. | By CUTHBERT BEDE. |
| Paved with Gold. | By AUGUSTUS MAYHEW. |
| An Unprotected Female. | By TOM TAYLOR. |
| Con O'Kelly. | By CHARLES LEVER. |

**** Other volumes of this series will follow in quick succession.**

All the above in neat fancy cloth, gilt lettered, printed on special
paper, with specially designed title in red and black, 1s. each.

OWNEY'S SIXPENNY LIBRARY

(Continued).

COPYRIGHT SERIES.

NOW READY.

The Devil Stick.

By FERGUS HUME, Author of "The
Mystery of a Hansom Cab."

. Now published for the first time in book form.

Cabinet Secrets.

By HEADON HILL.

Mrs. Bouverie.

By F. C. PHILIPS.

The Co-Respondent.

By G. W. APPLETON.

Through Green Glasses.

By F. M. ALLEN.

A Dark Intruder.

By R. DOWLING.

Another's Burden.

By JAMES PAYN.

Robert Holt's Illusion.

By Miss LINSKILL.

Bishop's Amazement.

By CHRISTIE MURRAY.

Did He Deserve It?

By MRS. RIDDELL.

The Voyage of the Ark.

By F. M. ALLEN.

A Terrible Legacy.

By G. W. APPLETON.

And others in quick succession.

ILLUSTRATED GIFT BOOKS

Price 21s.

Historic Churches of Paris. By W. F. LONERGAN.
Illustrated by B. S. LE FANU, and from Photographs. Crown 4to,
gilt edges.

Price 12s. 6d.

Hyde Park from Domesday-Book to Date. By
JOHN ASHTON. Illustrated by the Author.

Price 10s. 6d.

Paved with Gold. A Story of London Streets. By
AUGUSTUS MAYHEW. Illustrated with 26 Etchings by JOHN
LEECH, printed from the original steel plates.

**The Struggles and Adventures of Christopher
Tadpole.** By ALBERT SMITH. Illustrated with 26 Etchings by
JOHN LEECH, printed from the original steel plates.

Photography, Artistic and Scientific. By ROBERT
JOHNSON and A. B. CHATWOOD. With fifty-four Photographic
Illustrations.

Price 7s. 6d.

The Fortunes of Torlogh O'Brien. A Story of the
Wars of King James. By J. SHERIDAN LE FANU. Illustrated
with 22 Etchings by PHIZ, printed from the original steel plates.

Price 6s.

An Ocean Tramp. A Story of Maritime Adventure.
By Captain CHARLES CLARK. Illustrated by W. B. HAND-
FORTH.

College Girls. By ABBE CARTER GOODLOE. Illustrated
by CHARLES DANA GIBSON.

A Chronicle of Golden Friars. By J. SHERIDAN LE
FANU. Illustrated by B. S. LE FANU.

Ninety-Eight. A Story of the Irish Rebellion. Illus-
trated by A. D. MCCORMICK.

The Kanter Girls. A Book for Young People. By
MARY L. BRANCH. Illustrated by HELEN MAITLAND ARM-
STRONG.

ILLUSTRATED GIFT BOOKS—*continued*

Price 5s.

Love in Old Cloathes and other Stories. By H. C. BUNNER. Illustrated by W. T. SMEDLEY, ORSON LOWELL, and ANDRÉ CASTAIGNE.

The Cock and Anchor. A Tale of old Dublin City. By J. SHERIDAN LE FANU. Illustrated by B. S. LE FANU.

The Watcher and other Weird Stories. By J. SHERIDAN LE FANU. Illustrated by B. S. LE FANU.

The Evil Guest. By J. SHERIDAN LE FANU. Illustrated by B. S. LE FANU.

Price 3s. 6d.

Arthur Gordon Pym. A Romance. By EDGAR ALLAN POE. Illustrated by A. D. McCORMICK.

The Scalp Hunters. By CAPTAIN MAYNE REID. Illustrated by W. B. HANDFORTH.

The Gold Bug and other Tales. By EDGAR ALLAN POE. Illustrated by A. D. McCORMICK.

The Epicurean. By THOMAS MOORE. Illustrated by W. B. HANDFORTH.

Brayhard. The Strange Adventures of One Ass and Seven Champions. By F. M. ALLEN. Illustrated by HARRY FURNISS.

Schoolboys Three. A Story of Life in a Jesuit College. By W. P. KELLY. Illustrated by M. FITZGERALD.

A Fallen Star. A Story of the Scots in Prussia. By CHARLES LOWE. Illustrated by GEORGE M. PATERSON.

Price 2s. 6d.

The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green. By CUTHBERT BEDE, B.A. Illustrated by the Author.

The Little Green Man. By F. M. ALLEN. Illustrated by B. S. LE FANU.

Prince Patrick. By ARNOLD GRAVES. Illustrated by A. D. McCORMICK.

Price 1s.

Wealth and Wild Cats. Travels through the Gold Fields of Western Australia and New Zealand. By RAYMOND RADCLIFFE.

21

30

6

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

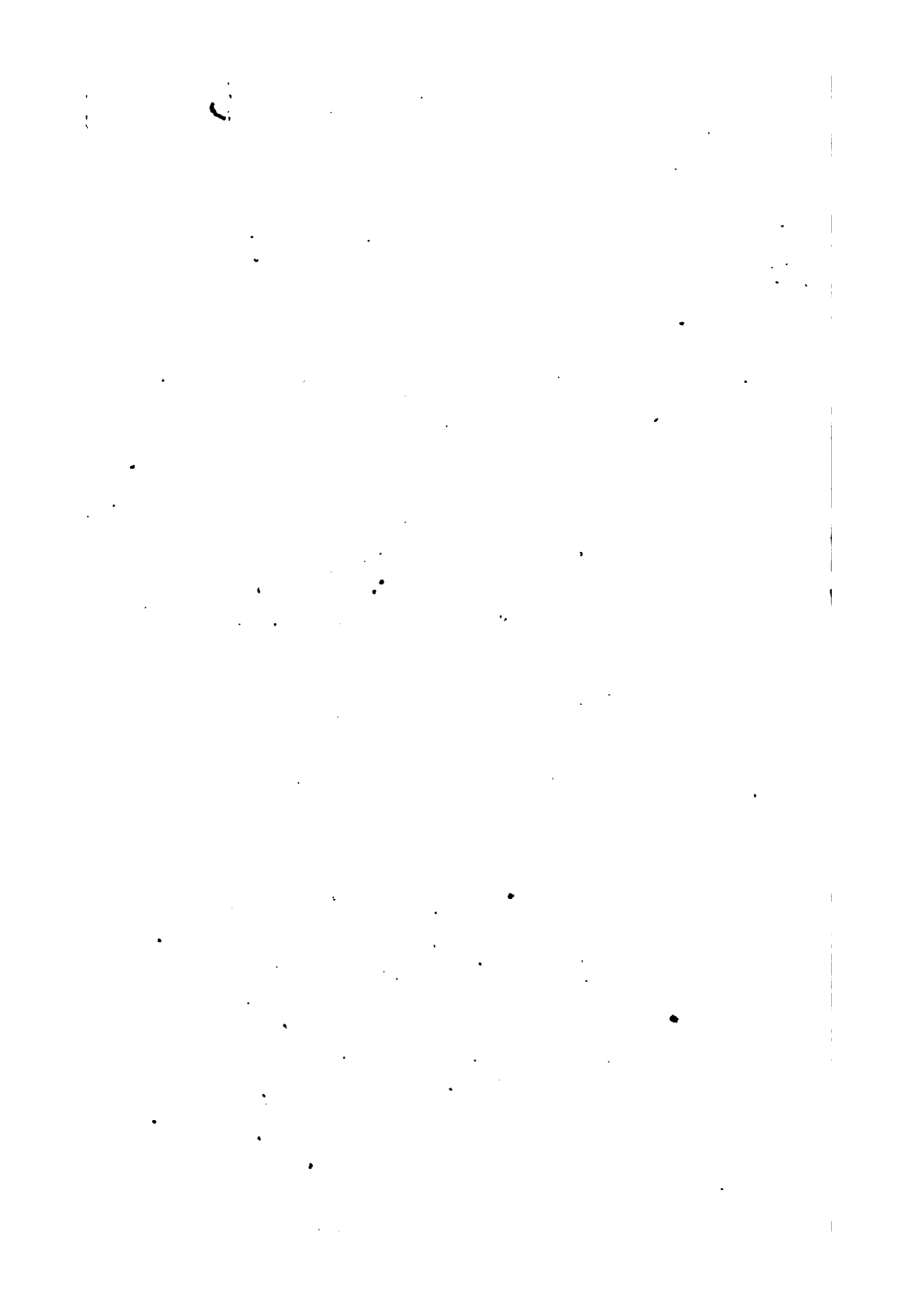
1

1

1

1

1



3 6105 036 801 087

STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA
94305

